Agents of the Hidden Imam

In 874 CE, the eleventh Imam died and the Imami community splintered. The institutions of the Imamate were maintained by the dead Imam's agents, who asserted they were in contact with a hidden twelfth Imam. This was the beginning of "Twelver" Shiʿism. Edmund Hayes provides an innovative approach to exploring early Shiʿism, moving beyond doctrinal history to provide an analysis of the socio-political processes leading to the canonization of the Occultation of the twelfth Imam. Hayes shows how the agents cemented their authority by reproducing the physical signs of the Imamate, including protocols of succession, letters, and alms taxes. Four of these agents were ultimately canonized as "envoys" but traces of earlier conceptions of authority remain embedded in the earliest reports. Hayes dissects the complex and contradictory Occultation narratives to show how, amid the claims of numerous actors, the institutional positioning of the envoys allowed them to assert a quasi-Imamic authority in the absence of an Imam.

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Agents of the Hidden Imam

Forging Twelver Shiʿism, 850–950 CE

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For Mum and Dad

Yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that Kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse. Yet I woll nate say that hit shall be so; but rather I wolde sey, here in thys worlde he changed his lyff. And many men say that there ys written upon the tumbe thys [vers]: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS [Here lies Arthur, king once, king to be].

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*

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Abbreviations

In the notes:

EIr	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*
EI2	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition
EI3	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition
Lane	Edward William Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93)

In translations from the Arabic:

AJ	*ʿAzza wa-jalla*, "He is glorified and great." Used of God.
AS	*ʿAlayhi al-salām*, "upon him be peace." Used of an Imam, or Imams if in the plural.
QAR	*Qaddasa Allāh rūḥahu*, "may God sanctify his soul" (or dual or plural forms). Used for the envoys.
RA	*Raḥimahu Allāh*, "may God have mercy upon him" (or dual or plural forms). Used for a venerated figure who has passed away.
RAA	*Raḍiya Allāh ʿanhu*, "may God be pleased with him" (or dual or plural forms). Used for agents, envoys, scholars, and other pious, venerated followers and companions of the Imams.
RATAA	*Raḍiya Allāh taʿālā ʿanhu wa-arḍāhu*, "may God most high be pleased with him and grant him contentment." Used for agents, envoys, scholars, and other pious, venerated followers and companions of the Imams.

SAA   *Ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi* or *Ṣalawāt Allāh ʿalayhi*, "may God bless him" or "God's blessings be upon him." Usually used for a prophet.

SAAA   *Ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-ālihi*, "may God pray for him and his family." Used for the Prophet Muḥammad.

SAAS   *Ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam*, "may God pray for him and grant him peace." Used for the Prophet Muḥammad.

T   *Taʿālā*, "He is most high." Used for God.

Introduction

On the eighth night of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, in the year 260 of the Hijra (874 CE)[1] the Imam al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī died in Samarra, then the capital city of the ʿAbbasid Empire. Ḥasan was too young to die – just twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old – and he had been leader of the small, but widely dispersed religious community of the Imami Shiʿa for only six years. With no obvious successor to replace him, his death refreshed a political crisis that had been brewing since his father's lifetime. Ḥasan's bitter rival – his brother Jaʿfar – seized the opportunity to reassert his own claim to succeed to the Imamate. Though Jaʿfar had some initial success in calling the Shiʿa to support him, he was ultimately rejected, to be remembered in Twelver Shiʿi sources as Jaʿfar "the Liar."[2] His failure was not from want of trying. Upon Ḥasan's death, Jaʿfar had leapt into action, mounting a dramatic attempt to seize the property of his dead brother. In one report, Jaʿfar is described as bringing a band of horsemen to raid and loot the house.[3] In another, Jaʿfar instigates someone to use an axe to break down the door of the dead Imam's

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[1] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-islāmiyya, 1388–91/1968–71), 1:503; Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li-l-Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib* (Qumm: Manshūrāt al-Riḍā, 1404/1983–84), 257–58, 261.

[2] The exception to this hostile attitude is that of the Naqavī Sayyids who descend from him. See Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʾite Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1993), 85.

[3] A report transmitted from the great-grandfather of al-Ḥasan b. Wajnāʾ corroborates the spirit of Jaʿfar's desperate action. It reports that Jaʿfar and a group of horsemen attacked the house with the intention of looting (*nahb*) and raiding (*ghāra*). The polemic role of this story is to show how the child twelfth Imam was saved from danger when he miraculously disappeared. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma fī ithbāt al-ghayba*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-islāmiyya, 1395/1975), 470–72.

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house.[4] Yet another report, also hostile to Jaʿfar, gives us details about the tactics to which Jaʿfar resorted in order to get his hands on the family wealth – even as his brother's corpse was yet warm:

On the night of [the death of] Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī], Jaʿfar sealed the storehouses and whatever was in the house, and then he returned to his own lodgings. In the morning, he came to the house and entered it so as to carry off the things upon which he had placed his seal. But when he opened the seals (khawātim) and went inside, we saw there was nothing but a trifling amount left in the house and in the storehouses, so he beat all of the servants and the slave girls, but they said to him, "Do not beat us, by God! Indeed, we saw the possessions, and the men loaded up the camels in the street, but we were unable to speak or move until the camels set off, after which the doors were locked just as they had been." Jaʿfar gave out a great howl of dismay, and struck his head in regret at what had left the house.[5]

Jaʿfar's attempt to seize the house and property of his dead brother was a strategic assertion of control over both the material and the symbolic power of the Imamate. Scholars seldom consider the broader implications of the material wealth of the Imams and the resources they controlled through their networks, although we commonly hear of Imams passing down a legacy of objects of sacred value and symbolic power to their successors: books of prophetic knowledge, the weapons of holy heroes, and so on.[6] To neglect the materially embedded dimension of the Imamate is a mistake. The symbolism of the Imamate was rooted both in doctrinal frameworks and in material relations. Conversely, the wealth they controlled was not just money, but a conduit for purification, blessing, prestige, and the indication of favor. Money and objects of value were sent to the Imam by his followers in exchange for blessing and purification: the currency in a kind of "sacred economy"[7] that served as social glue which

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[4] Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1:331–32.

[5] al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, al-Hidāya al-kubrā (Diyār ʿAql [Lebanon]: Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa, 1428/2007), 288–89.

[6] For a description of the early Shiʿi conception of waṣiyya, including the transmission of physical items like swords, turbans, and, of course, books, see Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shīʿa Tradition," Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 1 (1979): 45–51. While much of this may belong to the realm of the purely mythical, it is certain that the sanctity of the Imam was considered to be suffused into the gifts they gave their followers, and presumably other physical objects in their possession also. There is no reason to believe, thus, that there were not significant objects of real symbolic power present among the possessions to be inherited from the Imam.

[7] Edmund Hayes, "The Imams as Economic Actors: Early Imami Shiʿism as a 'Sacred Economy,'" in Land and Trade in Early Islam: The Economy of the Islamic Middle East 750–1050 CE, ed. Fanny Bessard and Hugh Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in 2021).

held the Imami Shiʿi community together. The house of the Imams was not just a dwelling, but a focus for pilgrimage[8] and the central location for the collection of canonical taxes. This book is an attempt to root the history of the Imami Shiʿa in both the material and the ideological relations binding the community, and to view this foundational moment in the forging of Twelver Shiʿism through the lens of political, institutional, and social forces. Doctrine is produced through social factors, not purely through the autonomous work of intellectuals and pious systematizers.

This book centers on a moment of historical transition: the transition from the leadership of the living, manifest Imams, to a community without a visible, physically present Imam. Although this transitional period was in some ways a continuation of the history of an Imami Shiʿi community, it was also the moment in which a newly defined community emerged, who came to call themselves "Twelvers," after the closed sequence of canonical twelve Imams they recognized (Table 1).

The Twelvers are currently the most populous Shiʿi denomination and a hugely influential force within the diverse and complicated history of Islam, and yet relatively few careful critical studies have been made into the complex and contradictory evidence for this foundational moment of Twelver Shiʿism. Central to this story are the agents of the hidden Imam who created the conditions of possibility for the establishment and canonization of this

TABLE 1 The canonical sequence of the twelve Imams of the Twelver Shiʿa

 1. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, d. 40/661
 2. al-Ḥasan, d. 49/670
 3. al-Ḥusayn, d. 61/680
 4. ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, d. 95/713–14
 5. Muḥammad al-Bāqir, d. 114/732–33
 6. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, d. 148/765
 7. Mūsā al-Kāẓim, d. 183/799
 8. ʿAlī al-Riḍā, d. 203/817
 9. Muḥammad al-Jawād, d. 220/835
10. ʿAlī al-Hādī, d. 254/868
11. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, d. 260/874
12. The hidden Imam: Muḥammad al-Mahdī (believed born before 260/874)

[8] Edmund Hayes, "Entwined Itineraries: Shiʿi Interpretations of Hajj and the Ziyara to the Shiʿi Imams," in *Hajj and the Arts of the Pilgrimage*, ed. Nasser D. Khalili, Qaisra Khan, and Nahla Nassar (in press).

defining doctrine of Twelver Shiʿism: the Occultation (*ghayba*) of the twelfth Imam. I aim to show how the direct leadership of the Imams collapsed, how it was replaced by the authority of agents of non-Imamic lineage,[9] and why the leadership of the agents collapsed in turn, only to be canonized as a key part of Twelver doctrine.

THE TWELVER DOCTRINE OF THE HIDDEN IMAM, HIS AGENTS,
AND THE ENVOYS

The classical Twelver narrative of the Occultation goes as follows:[10] A few years before the eleventh Imam died,[11] he had a son, who was shown to some but soon went into hiding. When his father died, the child became the Imam, but continued to live in hiding, due to the danger posed by the persecution of the ʿAbbasid caliph and his men. A sequence of four men was appointed to act as the hidden Imam's emissary or envoy (*safīr*, pl. *sufarāʾ*) during his Occultation:

1. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd (or Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr according to Kashshī) al-ʿAmrī (d. before 280/893)[12]
2. His son, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (d. 305/917)
3. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938)
4. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī[13] (d. 328–29/940–41)

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[9] Said Amir Arjomand explored this transition from the point of view of normative theologies of authority, "The Consolation of Theology: The Shiʿite Doctrine of Occultation and the Transition from Chiliasm to Law," *Journal of Religion* 76, no. 4 (1996): 548–71; and he has looked at political dynamics in "Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shiʿism: A Sociohistorical Perspective,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (1996): 491–515. However, in the latter article, while purportedly sociological, he concentrates more on theologico-political theories of authority, and does not engage directly with sources in order to identify the dynamics of the institutions of Imamate through which these processes were fulfilled.

[10] See, for example, Jassim Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London: Muhammadi Trust; San Antonio, TX: Zahra Trust, 1982), 1.

[11] Early sources do not agree about when the son of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī was born, with the day often given as 15 Shaʿbān, but the year varying between 256/870, 258/871, 260/874, or 261/874, or after the Imam's death, through the posthumously pregnant concubine. Hussain, *Occultation*, 70–73.

[12] See discussion of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's death date and the chronology of the early Occultation era in Chapter 6.

[13] There is no consensus about the correct vocalization of the name of the fourth envoy. I follow Omid Ghaemmaghami, who reads it as Samurī, after one of his ancestors whose name was al-Samur, meaning gum acacia tree. *Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-modern Twelver Shīʿī Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 96 n66. Traditional Twelver usage favors Samarrī, which Halm notes is "presumably a folk etymology called forth by

These envoys are marked out as different from regular Imamic agents (*wakīl*, pl. *wukalāʾ*) because of their special designation as supreme intermediaries between the hidden Imam and his followers.[14] The existence of the hidden Imam is understood to be proven, in part, by these men's witness, and the letters and messages from him which they carried, alongside reports from others who saw him or experienced his presence. Taken together these reports are understood to form incontrovertible proof that the hidden Imam exists. After the last of the four envoys died in 328–29/940–41, no further intermediary was appointed, and indeed, anyone who claims to be the hidden Imam's directly appointed intermediary before the return of the Imam is to be branded a liar. The twelfth Imam is understood to be the person known to all Muslims (not just the Shiʿa) as the Mahdī, or "guided one," a messianic figure who will return at the end of time to conquer and rule in peace and justice, where before there had been only oppression. This doctrinal account of the Occultation splits Twelver Shiʿi history into three: the period of presence or manifestation (*zuhūr*) of eleven Imams up until 260/874; the transitional "lesser Occultation," or "shorter Occultation," in which the four envoys mediated for the hidden Imam; and the current phase of "greater Occultation," or "complete Occultation," in which the Imam is not accessible, even through intermediaries. A final era of millennial combat followed by a period of just rule is expected at some unknown point in the future.[15]

The doctrine of the Occultation represents a key article of faith defining what it means to be Twelver.[16] In order to defend this doctrine, the earliest

the reminiscence of Sāmarrā." Instead, relying upon Samʿānī's *Ansāb* and Ṣuyūṭī's *Lubb al-lubāb*, Halm maintains that "we must no doubt assume a vocalization of al-Simarrī after a place Simmar near Kashkar between Wāsiṭ and Baṣra." Heinz Halm, *Shiʿism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 37, 143n16. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi uses both Sumirrī (111) and Simarrī (113), *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, tran. David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). Like Jassim Hussain, Abdulsater uses Sammarī, Hussein Ali Abdulsater, "Dynamics of Absence: Twelver Shiʿism during the Minor Occultation," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 2 (2011): 305–34. Hussain says that the name is derived from a location called al-Sammar or al-Ṣaymar, situated in one of the districts of Basra, where the relatives of al-Sammarī used to live: *Occultation*, 133.

[14] Though the word agent (*wakīl*) is still frequently attached to them in the reports about their activities.

[15] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Islam in Iran vii. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism," *EIr*.

[16] Of course, there are many who might doubt one or another element of the narrative, but when done so publicly, there have been consequences for the doubter's membership of the Twelver community. For an example from the modern era, see Yann Richard, "Sharīʿat Sangalajī: A Reformist Theologian of the Riḍā Shāh Period," in *Authority and Political*

Twelver scholars assembled a mass of reports[17] to demonstrate that the existence of the hidden Imam was so well-attested as to be incontrovertible. This resulted in a somewhat catch-all approach and the preservation of an eclectic array of accounts about the early years of the Occultation, some of which, when analyzed, imply interpretations that are quite different from each other and from what was finally canonized.

TOWARD A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE ENVOYS

Existing scholarship on the agents of the hidden Imam is plagued by two persistent problems: first, an uncritical acceptance of the doctrinal narrative of smooth succession between the Imams and the envoys; and second, a neglect of explicit, critical analysis of the early reports on the events surrounding the Occultation. With regard to the historicity of the envoys, we can separate scholarship into two broad orientations: those who more or less accept the Twelver account of the succession to authority of the envoys, on the one hand, and those who are skeptical, on the other. Most scholarship tends toward the Twelver account,[18] the major exception being a brief 1984 article by Verena Klemm, in which she argued that the office of envoy only really came to exist with the tenure of the third canonical envoy, Ibn Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī. Klemm suggests that the two first envoys were slotted into the office only retrospectively:

All the information that can be found – or better: cannot be found – about the two Baghdādī *wukalāʾ*, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī, suggests that they were forced afterwards into the institution of the *sifāra* which, in order to be credible, had to begin as early as the death of the eleventh Imām.[19]

Culture in Shīʿism, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 159–77.

[17] By hadith, I refer to reports which convey a normative religious authority, including reports from the prophets and Imams, but also other accounts which provide evidence for religious norms and beliefs. I regard the distinction between hadith and *akhbār* that some make as being artificial, at least for the material I analyze here.

[18] Modarressi's seminal *Crisis and Consolidation*, while it by no means glosses over the complexities of this moment in history, tends to imply that the succession of the envoys represents Imamic authority as uncomplicated and inevitable. Hussain's *Occultation* goes rather further in shoring up the traditional Twelver narrative. See also Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981).

[19] Verena Klemm, "The Four *Sufarāʾ* of the Twelfth Imām: On the Formative Period of the Twelfer Shiʿa," in *Shiʿism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 149.

This is an insightful hypothesis which deserves detailed exploration, but has not received it, either in Klemm's brief article, nor in the intervening years. Klemm speculated that, "it is not unthinkable that [Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī] and [the third envoy] Ibn Rawḥ together with other leading members of the Nawbakhtīs ... conspired to concoct the concept."[20] But the idea that the office of envoy was created *ex nihilo* by a cabal from the well-placed Baghdadi Nawbakhtī family is unsatisfactory. This still leaves a period of more than forty years between the death of the eleventh Imam and the accession of the third envoy, Ibn Rawḥ, in which the structures of authority in the Imami community are left unexplained. It suggests that structures of authority can be concocted. I would argue, instead, that authority must be established upon the foundation of extant doctrines and institutions. The wholesale concoction of an office is not plausible.[21] The agents had to establish their claims in the face of other rival actors competing for authority in the community at the time, all of whom were embedded in extant frameworks and institutions: members of the family of the Imams, servants, bureaucrats, mystics, theologians, and hadith transmitters. In order to be accepted, they had to make their claims explicit to the community based on recognized credentials. If the agents had not had roots in the institutional fabric of the community, they would not have been able to press their claims.

Modarressi's contribution to our understanding of the Occultation has been seminal. His account of the agents and the development of their financial network in six densely researched pages is a remarkable piece of scholarship.[22] But he preserves the basic outlines of the traditional narrative of the succession of the agents more or less intact:

Immediately after the abrupt death of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in 260/874, his close associates, headed by ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, made it public that the Imām had a son who was the legitimate successor to the Imāmate.[23]

This statement glosses over the contradictions in the early reports about who claimed there was a child Imam and when, underplaying the ideological nature of the succession account, and the clear contestations of authority

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[20] Ibid., 150.
[21] Adapting Weber's definition of authority (*Herrschaft*) as that which ensures that commands will be complied with; we might supplement it by stating that the authority of Imams and their agents ensures that their doctrinal rulings will be accepted as legitimate. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 135.
[22] See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 12–18, for the development of the financial network, and also the whole of Chapter 3 for the events leading to the Occultation.
[23] Ibid., 77.

between rival agents and elites in the earliest phase of the Occultation. Modarressi approaches the Occultation as intrinsically a theological issue, and he ignores the social-structural issues which were key aspects for the understanding of the challenges and successes of the agents.

Arjomand, in his widely cited articles on the significance of the Occultation, relies greatly on Modarressi's analysis. Like Modarressi, he does not provide his readers with clear analysis of the early Occultation reports.[24] Arjomand selects certain facts and narratives without providing reasoning for his selection criteria, an arbitrariness which sometimes leads to his cherry-picking facts.[25] It also has the effect of broadly leaving the basic elements of the orthodox Twelver narrative unquestioned. On the rise of the envoys, he states:

After the death of the eleventh imam, Hasan ibn ʿAli, in 874, his followers splintered into some fourteen groups. The ʿAmri father and son, who had directed the secretariat of the tenth and eleventh imams, maintained their control over a number of agents.[26]

The idea that the first envoys "maintained control over a number of agents" goes far beyond what our sources tell us. While couched in circumspect language, Arjomand reproduces Modarressi's basic assumption that from the very beginning, the envoys were envoys – that is, supreme agents atop a hierarchy – and that they took up from where the Imams left off without interruption. As I will argue, there is only sparse evidence that the elder ʿAmrī had "directed the secretariat of the tenth and eleventh imams"; and none that such a role continued into the Occultation period. Meanwhile there are many hints that the younger ʿAmrī had not been an agent of the eleventh Imam at all. Following Klemm, Arjomand does note that the ʿAmrīs were not envoys in the classical Twelver sense, but he attenuates her skepticism by suggesting not that Ibn Rawḥ had concocted the envoyship, but rather that the word "envoy" (*safīr*) was "A new designation ... put in circulation [at the time of Ibn Rawḥ] ... to upgrade the office of the chief

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[24] The exception being the eclectic rescript which he translates and comments on at length in Said Amir Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus* and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation: Imami Shiʿism around 900 CE/280–290 AH," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 1 (1997): 1–12. See my discussion below.

[25] Thus, for example, he mentions that "the father, ʿUthmān ibn Saʿīd ... carried out the funerary rites for the eleventh imam," without indicating that there were several conflicting accounts of the performance of funerary rites, and that the claim to have performed them was an intrinsically ideological claim to authority and successorship to the Imamate. Arjomand, "Crisis," 502. See my discussion of this issue below.

[26] Ibid.

representative [i.e. the envoy] as the sole official intermediary between the imam and the Shiʿis."[27] However, in his basic acceptance of the continuity in the pre- and post-Occultation ascendance of the ʿAmrīs, Arjomand essentially follows the orthodox Twelver narrative. Arjomand does acknowledge that the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar, "overcame significant opposition to his succeeding his father as the chief agent of the imam,"[28] but this does not go far enough. As I will show, the elder ʿAmrī was an agent of the eleventh Imam with almost no visible role in building Occultation-era institutions. The younger ʿAmrī, meanwhile, appears as a neophyte whose claims were rejected by some old-guard agents of the eleventh Imam. For all his sociological packaging, Arjomand, like Modarressi, makes no attempt to reconstruct the world of concrete institutions and social structures within which and through which the transition occurred. Instead, he provides an intellectual history of authority as theology, rather than a social history of authoritative institutions. Arjomand's basic insight that the direct guidance of Imams and envoys was replaced by the "consolation of theology" is still valid, but the question of practically how this happened must be reopened.

While I have drawn many insights from my scholarly predecessors, then, I will show that no clear succession of leadership was initially accepted, even within the core elite. This means that, initially, there was no real office of envoy in the sense of a broadly recognized community institution. The office had to be forged out of precedents set under the living Imams and adapted to the new conditions. Throughout, in their attempts to establish their authority, the envoys faced varied pressures that continued until the envoyship collapsed under the strain. I make no assumptions about the inevitability of the envoys' accession to Imamic authority. Instead, I propose that we should see the early years as a contest for leadership between different actors.

DOCTRINAIRE HISTORY: THE OCCULTATION AND THE "FOUR-ENVOY PARADIGM"

It is not my primary aim in this book to survey the theological elaboration of the Occultation doctrine.[29] However, an understanding of the elaboration and the crystallization of doctrine is crucial to the way in which we must

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[27] Ibid., 506.   [28] Ibid., 502.

[29] The key guides to the Occultation doctrine are the works of Modarressi (*Crisis*) in the realm of theology, and Hassan Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme: Etude bibliographique et histoire des textes* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), in the realm of hadith, but much remains to be done to fully understand the stages in the emergence of the doctrine. Ansari noted that his work was a bibliographical study focused on the sources of Occultation lore

treat our sources, which have been formed in response to these changing orthodoxies. The canonical Twelver story of the Imamic succession crisis and the authority of the agents first becomes visible in *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma*, written by great Twelver Shiʿi scholar Ibn Bābūya between 368/978–79 and his death in 381/991–92.[30] It is true that both Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's[31] *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, written around 290/903,[32] and Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab al-Nuʿmānī's (d. 360/970–71) *Kitāb al-ghayba*, which was completed in 342/953, had previously highlighted the importance of the agents in proving the existence of the hidden Imam and linking the community to him. However, Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl* is the first extant text to cite a report providing their names and laying down their canonical sequence,[33] along with a wealth of other reports. The conception of the agents continued to be refined in the following generations. It was given greater theological rigor by Mufīd[34] and reached its classical form in Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī's (d. 460/1067) *Ghayba*, written around 448/1056–57.[35]

Ṭūsī dedicated a series of chapters in his *Ghayba* to separating out more clearly who the envoys were and how they differ from less highly distinguished agents. Thus, before his section on "The praised envoys (*sufarāʾ*) during the time of the Occultation,"[36] he has a section on pre-Occultation agents, both "the praiseworthy, orthodox[37] among them," and the "blameworthy, doctrinally corrupt ones."[38] He also has a separate section on legitimate, but subordinate Occultation-era agents: "The Reliable people who sent rescripts[39] on behalf of those appointed to the envoyship during

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rather than a comprehensive work on the development of the Occultation doctrines. *L'imamat*, xiii.

[30] Ghaemmaghami cites Serdani as setting 368/978–79 as the *terminus post quem* of the composition of *Kamāl al-dīn*. *Encounters* 95n60. Ansari gives 368 as the date for the book's composition in Nishapur. *L'imamat*, 74. While Ibn Bābūya narrates a story regarding the reasons for composition of the book, there is no clear evidence for how long it might have taken to write. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 2–4.

[31] See Wilferd Madelung, "Abū Sahl Nawbaḵtī," *EIr.*   [32] Modarressi, *Crisis*, 88.

[33] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 432–33.

[34] al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmānī al-ʿUkbarī al-Mufīd, *al-Fuṣūl al-ʿashara fī al-ghayba*, ed. Fāris al-Ḥassūn, in *Mawsūʿat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, vol. 3 (Qumm: Dār al-Mufīd, 1431/2009).

[35] Sachedina, *Messianism*, 38.

[36] Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifa Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Najaf: Maktabat al-ādāb al-sharqiyya, 1423/2002), 219–45.

[37] Arabic: *ḥasan al-ṭarīqa*.   [38] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 214–19.

[39] The precise meaning of rescript (*tawqīʿ*) is a short response to a formal question or petition written directly on the page that was originally sent by the petitioner and returned to him or her. However, in Imami and Twelver accounts, the word is often used more broadly to refer to all letters issuing from the Imams or their representatives.

TABLE 2 Ṭūsī's taxonomy of praised and censured agents, envoys, and false Gates

	Good	Bad
Pre-Occultation	• Praised agents: loyal representatives of the manifest Imams	• Censured agents
Lesser Occultation	• Envoys: supreme, unique representatives of the hidden Imam • Agents: the allies of the envoys	• Those who claimed Gatehood (*bābiyya*): a miscellaneous collection of claimants to represent the hidden Imam

the time of the praised envoys"[40] and a section on "The censured ones who claimed Gatehood (*bābiyya*)."[41] This chapterization clearly separates out pre-Occultation orthodox and heterodox figures, and imposes a framework upon the intrinsically rather confusing reports from the early Occultation period, formulating a clear hierarchical taxonomy of Imamic representation based on the now-canonized categories of envoys and lesser agents (Table 2).

As will become clear, this taxonomy does not stand up to inquiry when compared with the actual contents of the reports in these chapters: the roles played by the men gathered in these chapters are so heterogeneous as to render the categories which Ṭūsī tries to impose upon them hard to sustain without considerable good will. Thus, for example, the men who appear in the chapter on "The censured ones who claimed Gatehood (*bābiyya*)" did not all claim to be *bāb*s, and certainly not in the same way. Instead, they represent diverse kinds of threat to the envoys and to Ṭūsī's vision of orthodoxy grouped together retrospectively. This chapter has a clear rhetorical purpose in Ṭūsī's project of canonization, acting as a negative mirror-image to his chapters on the four envoys and other praised figures.

The very term "envoy" (*safīr*), then, should be seen as part of a doctrinal development that largely postdates the events described in this book. The overwhelming majority of the earliest reports tend to call the early Occultation leaders of the community simply "agent" (*wakīl*) or some other more ambiguous term like "the venerable man" (*al-shaykh*).[42]

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[40] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 260–61.   [41] Ibid., 246–60.
[42] Meanwhile, the parallel term deputy (*nāʾib*, pl. *nuwwāb*), which becomes prominent in later formulations of the role of the envoys, is almost absent from the earliest reports.

However, I use the word "envoy" as a convenient way to refer to someone approaching the Twelver conception of an individual who, while he continued to collect money and issue Imamic letters, had a greater role than mere agents in that he was considered the sole mediator for the hidden Imam. Meanwhile, I use the word "agent" (*wakīl*) to refer to the manifest Imams' aides responsible for collecting money and letters on their behalf, some of whom continued in this capacity following the eleventh Imam's death. My use of the term "envoy" where it does not exist in the Arabic does introduce some complexities, however. One of the central arguments of this book is that the first of the canonical "four envoys," ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, did not occupy this position during the Occultation, because he lived at a time when the concept of "envoy" was not yet established. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd appears in reports primarily as an eyewitness to the hidden Imam, without being seen to actively participate in the Occultation-era institutions of Imamate. The first real "envoy" was his son, Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, the *second* in the traditional sequence of the canonical four envoys.

ELITE INTERESTS AND CHARISMATIC INSTITUTIONS

To understand the transition in the Imami community, we must understand the social channels through which leadership and doctrine were contested. Scholarship on Occultation-era institutions has tended to suffer from three shortcomings: a too-ready acceptance of the later canonical Twelver narrative; insufficient attention to the specific details of descriptions of the mechanisms and processes; and a tendency to reify informal institutions and procedures to present them as formal and unmalleable. To gain clarity, we must, as far as is possible, reject *a priori* assumptions about how the Imami community functioned and instead interrogate our sources for clues to build up a picture.

The most sustained theorization of authority structures in the transition from the manifest Imams to the Occultation has come from Arjomand.[43] Arjomand sees the Occultation as the culmination of an ongoing struggle for the soul of Imami Shiʿism between the supporters of an activist, revolutionary chiliasm who sought to overthrow the current world order, and a quietist, rationalistic orientation. He argues that quietist rationalism eventually won out as Imamis became reconciled to the loss

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[43] Arjomand, "Crisis"; Arjomand, "Consolation"; Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*."

of Imamic guidance accepting the "consolation of theology" as a replacement, and by sublimating hopes for immediate renewal of the world into distant expectations of an eventual millennial restoration, rather an imminent, revolutionary reparation of the political and social order. Arjomand's articles are insightful, but his model suffers from a number of serious flaws. He tends to assume that doctrinal distinctions were more crystallized than probably they were.[44] His influential article "Crisis of the Imamate" suffers from a black-and-white division between revolutionary chiliasm and quietist rationalism which simply does not reflect the sources. As a result, he provides analysis like the following:

> The crisis of the imamate and the breakdown of control from the holy seat after the death of the tenth imam resulted in an outbreak of "extremist" chiliasm (*ghuluww*), led by a group of Qummis identified with ʿAli ibn Hasaka, al-Qasim ibn Yaqtin, and Muhammad ibn Baba, whose aim was the deification of the deceased imam.[45]

The impression this gives is misleading. While it is true that the Twelver tradition branded these figures as exaggerators (*ghuluww*), there is no evidence that these figures were "chiliasts" with a particular yearning for imminent apocalyptic revolution. Instead, the challenge these figures posed was doctrinal heterodoxy. More importantly, their doctrines implied the practical diffusion of authority away from centralizing Imamic institutions toward their own persons. If there was any violent action involved, it did not stem from the revolutionary urges of the marginalized, but rather from the violent suppression which the institutions of the Imamate directed at these heterodox figures.[46] Moreover, Arjomand's treatment of Shiʿi history tends to subordinate political agency to doctrinal formations, thus obscuring the pragmatic dimension of political decisions. In his vision, doctrine tends to appear as determining behavior rather than being deployed and responding to political exigencies. In associating revolutionary chiliasm, particularly with the "*ghulāt*"

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[44] Thus, he makes statements like the following: "Albeit clandestinely, Imam Musa al-Kazim (d. 799) competed in political activism with Zaydis alongside whom he had fought in 762," Arjomand, "Crisis," 494. This suggests that Kāẓim was unusual in going beyond typical Imami "quietism" to take on Zaydi "activist" behavior. Instead, we should see Kāẓim as an autonomous political actor, and both Zaydi and Imami Shiʿi trends were to crystallize after his lifetime.

[45] Arjomand, "Crisis," 501.

[46] Edmund Hayes, "'Smash His Head with a Rock': Excommunication in Late Imami Shiʿism," *al-ʿUṣūr al-wusṭā* (in press).

exaggerators, Arjomand mischaracterizes the place of esoterist-incarnationist ideas within the doctrinal ecology of early Imami Shiʿism.[47]

Arjomand also mischaracterizes the structural dynamics of the Imami community, and the ways different groups within it acted. Key terms he deploys are "hierarchy" and "hierocracy" to indicate the key group within the Imami elite who were instrumental in the transition to Occultation.[48] He writes:

> After the cessation of the historical imamate, the leadership of the Imami community can be seen to devolve onto two groups: a fledgling hierarchy of ulema and agents loyal to the seat of the imam, and the politically powerful Imami families in the service of the caliphal state.[49]

He does not support his assertion of the existence of this "hierarchy" with evidence. If there was a hierarchy, then what did it look like, and how did it function? His characterization of a split between "two groups" is not supported by the sources. The incoherence of Arjomand's concept of hierocracy is most visible in his treatment of the Nawbakhtīs. Arjomand divides scholars and ʿAbbasid bureaucrats into separate groups who were engaged in a struggle for power: but were these really separate groups? As Arjomand himself acknowledges, the Nawbakhtī family were heavily involved in ʿAbbasid bureaucracy, produced prominent theologians, and also furnished the "hierocracy" with the third envoy. This implies overlapping roles, rather than "groups."[50] In general, his narrative seems to suggest that the Nawbakhtīs were outsiders to the hierocracy who,

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[47] Arjomand relies heavily on Modarressi, who has also been criticized for his attempts to divide "mainstream" Shiʿism from the esoteric ideas, while ignoring the great prevalence of such material in the canonical sources of the Shiʿi tradition. See Amir-Moezzi's review of *Crisis and Consolidation* in *Bulletin Critique des Annales Islamologiques* 14 (1997): 55; and more recently, Mushegh Asatryan's critique of Modarressi's unsustainable attempt to divide the more moderate *Mufawwiḍa* from the *Ghulāt, Controversies in Formative Shiʿi Islam: The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 99.

[48] The originator of the sociological use of the term "hierocracy" is Max Weber, who describes it as an organization "which enforces its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits," and which tends to be opposed to political authority in its rivalry for power and resources. Richard Swedberg, *Max Weber and the Idea of Economic Sociology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 111–12.

[49] Arjomand, "Crisis," 502.

[50] It does not help that Arjomand calls Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī a theologian with "hierocratic interests," perhaps in an attempt to sustain the "two groups" thesis. Ibid., 504. This seems to indicate a desire to distinguish between theology and hierocracy, although as a theologian, surely Abū Sahl counts as a scholar? Therefore, we might expect Abū Sahl to be naturally one of Arjomand's "hierocrats," rather than merely having "hierocratic interests." It is possible, however, that by "scholar," Arjomand really wants to refer only to jurists and hadith transmitters.

however, with the emergence of the Occultation doctrine, "came to exercise a preponderant influence over the perplexed Imami hierarchy":[51] one "group" influencing another. But he does not clearly set out criteria for judging whether someone should be seen as coming from within the hierarchy or from outside. Given that Ibn Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī was himself an agent and envoy, it would seem to be more logical to see him as part of Arjomand's "hierocracy," rather than an outside influence upon it. But perhaps Ibn Rawḥ's predecessors were part of the true hierocracy, then? The confusion mounts when one notes that Arjomand follows Klemm in denying that the first two canonical envoys, the father-and-son ʿAmrīs, had really been envoys.[52] In this case, what exactly was hierocratic authority before the Nawbakhtīs took control of it? How did it operate in practice? Who was part of the hierocracy, and in what way? Arjomand never provides answers to these questions.

In his articles on the Occultation, Arjomand gives no definition of hierocracy, but clues come elsewhere, for he uses the term to distinguish an organization of clerical religious professionals who vied for power and influence with an early-modern state.[53] While this framework might work well for Safavid and Qajar clerical establishments, it poorly fits the very different context of the early Occultation. While using "hierocracy" with reference to the early Occultation period, Arjomand implies a conflation of scholars and agents. But our sources give no clear basis for this conflation. On the contrary, there is much to suggest that agents and scholars were not a unified bloc, and this begs further questions about who might be considered a "scholar" and how they might have participated in this assumed

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[51] Ibid., 502.

[52] Thus, he notes that "official Shiʿi history . . . anachronistically counts the ʿAmris as *safir*s." Ibid., 508. However, he contradicts himself in the same article by suggesting that the younger ʿAmrī was in fact designated as *safīr* during his lifetime: "A new designation, *safīr* (intermediary), seems to have been put in circulation around this time [toward the end of the younger ʿAmrī's life] in order to upgrade the office of the chief representative as the sole official intermediary between the imam and the Shiʿis" (506). See below for my identification of the first usage of the word *safīr* in a report referring to Ibn Rawḥ.

[53] Thus, he uses the term to describe Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī's "consolidation of a Shiʿite hierocracy of religious professionals" so as to use the "Shiʿite religion . . . as a weapon for the enhancement of differentiated hierocratic domination directly upon the masses, and without the intermediary of the state as the apparatus of political domination." Said Amir Arjomand, "Shiʿite Hierocracy and the State in Pre-modern Iran: 1785–1890," *European Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (1981): 43. He also distinguishes the Shiʿite hierocracy who sought autonomy from religious professionals who accommodated themselves to state service. Said Amir Arjomand, "The Clerical Estate and the Emergence of a Shiʿite Hierocracy in Safavid Iran: A Study in Historical Sociology," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 28, no. 2 (1985): 169–70.

"hierarchy." Are *fuqahā* jurists, theologians, and casual transmitters of hadith all to be equally considered as "scholars" and "hierocrats"? And how was this hierocracy created and sustained?

While Arjomand's articles are provocative, the framework he proposes is at turns both incoherent and too black and white, and always insufficiently based upon a comprehensive analysis of the complex and contradictory evidence of the narrative reports. Instead of attempting to build upon his framework, then, I have started from scratch, analyzing the evidence of the sources to produce a new framework for understanding the Imami community at the time of transition. If Arjomand's model of the agents as part of a "hierocracy" is insufficiently grounded in the evidence of the sources themselves, what alternative models should we resort to?[54] Instead of seeing "two groups" as the major actors in the Occultation period, we should see the Imami community as consisting of overlapping fields of activity, often organized geographically or through kinship, rather than being based on doctrine. Within these fields, individual actors could have different profiles and roles: agent, hadith transmitter, theologian, local community delegate, and so on. It is important to distinguish between these roles, but we must also acknowledge that multiple roles could be united in a single individual, like the agent, scholar, hadith transmitter, and community delegate Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī. In order to achieve greater precision in thinking about the nature of the Imami (and thereafter Twelver) community, I would propose the following frameworks to describe the positioning of individual actors: their geographical base; politico-doctrinal affiliations; interpretive milieu; and personal role and profile in the institutions of the community. Geographical base would refer to the primary (and perhaps secondary and tertiary) location of activity and embeddedness. The key geographical nodes in this period are Baghdad and Qumm, but others are also important. Politico-doctrinal affiliation refers in the first place to the Imam and line of Imams which were acknowledged as canonical; but also, to the recognition of current agents and local intermediaries and the key doctrinal shibboleths they imposed. Interpretive milieu refers to the doctrinal, cosmological, and epistemological frameworks used for interpreting texts and events: rationalist, hadith-based, or esoterist, for example.[55] Related,

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[54] I have no particular objection to the term "hierocracy" in itself. I will tend to avoid the word "hierocracy" in this work to avoid confusion with Arjomand's arguments and assumptions.

[55] A single politico-doctrinal affiliation (for example the recognition of the same Imam, agents, and touchstone doctrine of the Occultation of the hidden Imam) might combine with radically different interpretive milieus.

but not identical, is an actor's personal role and profile: agent, scholar (which I use generally to refer to authors of books), hadith transmitter, *kalām* theologian,[56] family member of the Imams, or ʿAbbasid bureaucrat. Simple dichotomies are to be avoided. Seldom can these fields be clearly distinguished as "groups" as Arjomand did, but often involve overlapping affiliations. Thus, one could be an agent and a hadith transmitter, or a hadith transmitter and a scholar. Or one could be a rationalist scholar who was, however, associated with an unorthodox political affiliation which threw one into an alliance with those from a non-rationalist interpretive milieu.[57]

Though this was an environment of considerable complexity, neither should we give up and fall back on a vague picture of ambiguity or unbounded fluidity: social groups are in all human contexts experienced as real, and they channel and determine social and political behavior. Although we cannot sort the overlapping fields into two competing groups as Arjomand attempted to, we can see that the politics of the Occultation were contested through visible networks of association and institutional expectation embedded in concrete subcommunities and groups.

As I will argue, the agents and envoys of the Occultation were not scholarly professionals.[58] Few are recorded as having authored books other than in their capacity as disseminators of Imamic statements, but this was an extension of their role in mediating the oral and textual representation of Imamic guidance to the community, rather than their own scholarly production of knowledge. In the Occultation era, the centralizing "bureaucratic" authority of the envoys who issued new Imamic statements increasingly came into tension with the epistemic authority of those who collected and preserved the hadith of Imams past. Although, during the period of transition, the centralizing efforts of the agents were salutary for the enforcement of a new Twelver doctrinal consensus, it was ultimately the scholars with their more diffuse epistemic, non-bureaucratic

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[56] I employ the redundancy here for clarity: not all theology is *kalām*.

[57] Like the pro-Jaʿfar "the Liar" Faṭḥite *fuqahāʾ* who allied with the followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim. See below and Edmund Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been: Jaʿfar 'the Liar,' His Followers, and the Negotiation between Political Realism and Esotericist Idealism," in *Reason, Esotericism and the Construction of Authority in Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Rodrigo Adem and Edmund Hayes (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[58] *Pace* Amir-Moezzi who provides weak evidence for his assertion that the four envoys "would have belonged to the category of jurist-theologians," by noting that "The Imami scholar from Basra, Ibn Nūḥ al-Sīrāfī (early fifth/eleventh century) had compiled a legal compendium called *Akhbār al-wukalāʾ al-arbaʿa*." Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 224–25, n115.

leadership who came to establish their claim to be the representatives of the hidden Imam.

Actors in the Imami community were not free to act with impunity. They operated in the context of institutions which had generated weighty expectations for behavior. In particular, in this book, I will be interested in what I call "the institutions of Imamate," which were associated with, but not identical to, the person and agency of the Imam. These institutions were embedded in wider sets of societal institutions like marriage, inheritance, oath-making, and legal and administrative norms, all of which structured expectations in the ways Imamis interacted with each other and with society beyond their community. As for the institutions of Imamate, it is difficult to define them clearly due to the nature of the sources, the paucity of sociohistorical research to date, and the changing nature of these institutions. In the grand scheme, the institutions of the Imami community were not very old. If we date the emergence of an institutionalized Imami Imamate to the death of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (148/765),[59] these institutions were only a century old by the time of the Occultation: enough time to become entrenched, but without the complexity and crystallization, say, of the churches and monasteries of their Christian neighbors, or the institutions of the Jews of medieval Cairo whose lives are uniquely accessible through scholarship on the Geniza.[60]

Central among the institutions which are visibly influential during the crisis of succession are fiscal-financial institutions: the agents' collection of alms taxes, estate revenues and donations for the Imam, and the corresponding redistribution of wealth and blessings among the community. The circulation of wealth within a "sacred economy"[61] is one of the key frameworks through which the Imami community, as a real, experienced *community* of direct interaction and mutual assistance, can be understood. The payment of the alms tax and donations to the Imamate were a means of demonstrating concrete religiopolitical

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[59] See Chapter 1.

[60] Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967); Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[61] See Hayes, "The Imams as Economic Actors."

affiliation: commitment to a *particular* Imam, and formed the first move in an exchange of worldly goods for spiritual goods – the blessings and purification the Imam could provide. These financial institutions intersect with other key frameworks of belonging, including the dissemination of doctrine and law; for the agents of the Imam not only collected money, but at the same time they issued the Imams' statements concerning right and wrong practice (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*), belief, and the excommunication (*barāʾa*) of the unorthodox.

In using the term "institutions" I do not thereby intend formal, chartered organizations, but rather a set of regularized expectations within which behavior was constrained.[62] The institutions of Imamate were centered upon an individual, the Imam, and this had the result of encouraging a personal dimension, or blurring lines between personal and official functions and actions. By the time of the Occultation, agents were certainly appointed, and may be regarded as "officials," but they operated within a world heavily defined by interpersonal relations. However, these relations should not thereby be understood as unstructured: as Mottahedeh has noted, the societies of this period tended to be characterized by a relatively high degree of formality in relationships between individuals.[63] Nonetheless, many of the key dynamics of the Imamate sprung from the personal context of the Imam: including familial practices which defined who was the head of the family, and procedures of succession and inheritance. Other dynamics can be seen as being generated by figures outside the Imamic family, including the ideology of leadership produced by theologians in the circle of the Imams, and the demands for spiritual succor placed upon the figure of the Imam by petitioners from the wider community. The actions of the agents were a point of interface between the Imams and the community, and should be seen as representing

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[62] There is no universally accepted definition of "institution," and it tends to be used on a spectrum of lesser to greater informality. Eduardo Manzano, "Why Did Islamic Medieval Institutions Become So Different from Western Medieval Institutions?" *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015): 122. In this book, I use the term "institution" not only to refer to formal organizations, but also to less formal, yet socially entrenched expectations for action and behavior. In this respect, I concur with Scott's definition, that "Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience [and are] composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life." William Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 48.

[63] "Buyid society was characterized by the formality of certain ties between individuals, and the informality of ties within groups that are not composites of ties between individuals." Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 6.

a negotiation between the needs of the Imams, and the needs of the community.

PERIODIZATION

Much in this book revolves around attempts to establish chronologies and periodizations for events which tend to be mixed together as generic "proofs of the Occultation" in our sources. A key means of doing this is by understanding the lives of individuals and the networks they operated in, including, but not limited to, the envoys themselves. Many of my conclusions with regard to chronology are based on granular details and are often provisional. However, it is worth pointing to a couple of major-order arguments about periodization at the outset. I do not regard the split into "lesser Occultation" and "greater Occultation" as historically useful, other than to denote a doctrinal formation. Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī already argued that he was living in a period of greater Occultation in 290/903, several decades before the canonical Twelver date for its occurrence. Instead, I prefer to refer to the "early Occultation era" to denote the period in which the Occultation doctrine was emerging. The early Occultation can be split into an early period in which no clear consensus is visible, but in which certain old-guard agents of the eleventh Imam were making their presence felt; and a new phase initiated a couple of decades later when the old guard died out and Abū Jaʿfar began to establish his claim to be the envoy of the hidden Imam. Following the death of the third of the canonical envoys, Ibn Rawḥ, the collapse of the envoyship began. The phase of collapse includes the career of the fourth envoy, who never really established his authority, as well as the following decade which included further claims to envoyship, though it became increasingly clear that the institution was unsustainable. This phase of collapse can be seen to end with the dissemination of Nuʿmānī's *Ghayba*, in which the canonical Twelver conception of the end of the "lesser Occultation" was articulated, finally inaugurating the era of the complete or "greater Occultation." In this periodization, then, we should perhaps not talk about *four* envoys, but rather split the period into the era of the corporate leadership of the old-guard agents, followed by the era of the only two envoys (the second and the third canonized ones) who really managed to establish their authority, and finally a short phase of would-be envoys (including the fourth) whose authority was never fully established. This periodization is much indebted to my reading of a key source: Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Tanbīh*.

The Twelver Occultation is a doctrine, but is also a set of narratives, of which the biographies of the agents and envoys form a key part. Thus, it behooves us to ask ourselves how we can best deal with narrative and the ways in which foundational narratives are institutionally and politically embedded in particular societies and communities. Rumors can be spread and stories can be invented, but convincing narratives are rarely fabricated out of whole cloth. Instead, they must be stitched together of existing materials. Narratives are produced within the boundaries of an extant tradition, and the dynamics of dissemination and preservation are determined by milieu and the available technologies of transmission: whether these be handwritten letters produced by a medieval chancery, or electronic signals sent and received by mobile phones. These mechanisms and the social networks within which they functioned are visible and determine the form of the messages: our sources themselves often provide the keys for solving their own mysteries.

The sources used to write this book are, for the most part, not new. With the exception of the last chapter of Khaṣībī's *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, most of them have been read and used by scholars for decades. However, they can be read in new ways to reconstruct narratives that have been lying obscured within later frameworks of interpretation. The earliest sources that narrate the events of the early Occultation period are tenth- and eleventh-century CE compilations of hadith reports or *akhbār* (I use these terms interchangeably for this period).[64] The compilers of these works aimed to produce a strong foundation for the crystallizing doctrines of the Occultation and the four envoys. However, while the elaboration of new doctrines provided an impetus for the manipulation of narrative, the professional habitus of hadith compilers, whose prestige rested upon the sober evaluation of their sources, ensured that fabrication could only occur in limited ways. Rather than making things up themselves, hadith compilers were much more likely to rely on subtle combinations of earlier reports. These were usually put into circulation earlier than the crystallization of the orthodox Occultation doctrine, then bundled together into mosaic narratives which made sense in broad terms. A key aim of an early

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[64] My justification for doing so is that in this literature, it would be artificial to make a distinction between reports of a religious nature (hadith) and historical nature (*akhbār*): a distinction that is sometimes made. In addition, the term *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*) is routinely used by Shiʿi scholars to refer to reports of the words and actions of the Imams, comparable in importance, therefore, to the prophetic hadith of the Sunni tradition.

Occultation writer, like Ibn Bābūya, was to demonstrate that the existence of the hidden Imam had been massively attested by numerous witnesses. This meant that eyewitness reports of the hidden Imam were compiled together, even if, taken individually, they gave quite different accounts of events. Thus, we can reconstruct earlier debates and interpretations of events if we read the individual reports carefully, and understand them as narratives in their own right, circulated to demonstrate rather different arguments than those of the later canonizing compilers.

In telling the story of the agents, the envoys, and the transition they effected, our sources are relatively near in time to the events they portray: just a few decades separate the death of Ibn Rawḥ from the foundational composition of Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*. The reports which are preserved in a work like the *Kamāl* clearly show a development in the doctrinal framework for understanding who the agents were, and what their function was. This is both challenging and heartening: the historical vision in these reports is a difficult moving target, but at the same time their development provides us a window into the changing worldviews which led to the recording of these reports. Ibn Bābūya's own sense of his place in the world, for example, was personally implicated in the authority of the envoys. His father had written a letter to the envoy Ibn Rawḥ asking for a religiously literate son, and Ibn Bābūya himself was the baby which blessed the pious father's request.[65] This proximity to his material means that Ibn Bābūya had many rich stories to draw upon, but also that he had an interest in supporting the legitimacy of the envoyship. Likewise, Ibn Barniya, one of Ṭūsī's key informants, was the great-grandson of the second canonical envoy, Abū Jaʿfar.[66] The sources that deal with the earliest phase of this period are almost exclusively Twelver. Only the third of the canonical envoys, the ʿAbbasid courtier Ibn Rawḥ, is the subject of accounts which originate from narrators beyond the Imami community. This means that the earliest phase of the Occultation must be reconstructed with almost no independent sources.[67] Nonetheless, the reports the Twelver sources contain provide surprisingly rich testimony to non-canonical positions. The fact that many of the reports were preserved within living memory of the events in question means that points of dispute could not be easily effaced, but, indeed, had to be dealt with

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[65] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 194–95.   [66] Ibid., 231, 259; Klemm, "*Sufarāʾ*," 148.

[67] We do have some non-Imami heresiographies which provide some important details, but these restrict themselves to skeletal outlines and do not provide narrative accounts of the events.

explicitly in these narratives. In our earliest reports the canonical status of the envoys had not yet even been established.

 Almost all scholarly accounts of the Occultation hitherto fall into the mistake of cherry-picking reports which seem most plausible, without clearly identifying reasons for preferring one version above another. Of course, some personal intuition will always be involved in the writing of history. But with accounts so subtly nuanced in their divergences as those of the early Occultation, it is imperative that historians should show their workings, quote their narratives at length, and analyze them in detail. Instead, the extant scholarship on the Occultation tends to operate by making assertions and backing them up with a forest of footnotes. The master of this is Modarressi, whose *Crisis and Consolidation* is very often accurate in its characterization of the literature of the early Occultation, but which provides readers with almost no sense of the reasons why interpretive decisions are made, and so carefully weighted judgments are indistinguishable from arbitrary speculation. In order to avoid this shortcoming, I have attempted to show clearly the reasons I make an assertion, and to follow a relatively systematic methodology in approaching the sources. In reading the narrative sources and reconstructing the chronologies of Occultation debates, I have followed the following broad principles:

- Earlier works are preferred to later sources.
- Reports which clearly articulate the crystallized Occultation doctrine are deemed likely to be later formulations.
- Conversely, reports which seem to contradict or complicate the crystallized Twelver doctrine may well preserve earlier debates and narratives, or those from a different interpretive milieu which might give alternative insights.
- While some elements of reports may have been massaged or falsified to convey a particular image, their social and institutional contexts are unlikely to have been utterly falsified, as that would undermine their ability to pass as truthful. Thus, even doubtful reports provide evidence for social context, as well as the tropes and arguments extant in a particular interpretive milieu. Even mythic or miraculous frameworks give us an important window into how the meanings of events were construed.
- Narratives are not circulated in a vacuum, and so the names of those who appear in reports, the names of those who transmit these reports, and the networks they make up are crucial pieces of evidence for understanding the political significance of narrative at particular moments in time.
- However, the degree of personal involvement in the contents of reports does not continue in the same way over generations. Later transmitters are likely to be

more interested in the aggregate picture presented by groups of reports, rather than the individual political details of individual reports. Conversely, as doctrines become increasingly crystallized, later transmitters might be expected to be increasingly concerned with the harmonization of reports to key canonical shibboleth doctrines.

- Attention should be paid to the style and form of the report: each report gives away something of the milieu it was first circulated in, and the intention behind its reproduction.
- In particular, a central distinction is to be made between narrative reports recording activities and events, and canonizing statements which attempt to summarize doctrinal formulations of the past (such as statements of the succession of sequences of Imams or envoys).
- The tradition is uncomfortable with innovation. Thus, innovation tends to be disguised, for example, in restatements of earlier hadith. Totally newly generated material should be tracked carefully, including differences in lexicon and usage.

Isnāds

In reading reports about the Occultation, we are greeted by a mass of information in the form of *isnād* chains of transmission. These have been insufficiently exploited as a means of understanding the sociopolitical context of the transmission of the doctrine. Hassan Ansari has made intensive use of *isnād*s in his milestone work *L'Imamat et l'Occultation selon l'Imamisme*, but has not yet brought insights from such study to bear on the lives of the agents. Najam Haider's arguments regarding the utility of *isnād* analysis for reconstructing the dynamics of social group interaction has been a crucial influence on my thinking.[68] Throughout my research for this book I have been attentive to the information provided by the *isnād*, though in the interests of space and readability, I have not always been able to give a full account of this analysis, but my intent to understand the social, political, and epistemic networks expressed in *isnād*s has been constantly embedded in my thinking. Systematic *isnād*-analysis is still in its infancy in the field of Shiʿi studies.[69] I have not

[68] Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[69] See Kohlberg's introduction to the current state of the study of Shiʿi hadith: Etan Kohlberg, "Introduction," in *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 165–80. The

employed *isnād*-analysis in the way that scholars of the massive Sunni collections of prophetic hadith have done. The hadith reports I am dealing with are not amenable to such treatment, being transmitted in ones and twos. However, in my analysis I show that the relationships between the protagonists of the early Occultation reports and their transmitters, in some cases (such as Aḥmad b. Isḥāq and ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī), is both close and significant, and so the transmitters themselves must be seen as protagonists in the political contestation of authority through the dissemination of doctrine. Each generation can be seen to make and remake the narrative in order to make it work for themselves. This is, no doubt, why few of the very earliest books about the Occultation have been preserved intact. They must have portrayed incomplete, transitional stages in the development of the Occultation that were unpalatable to later generations. My method in approaching the relations between protagonist and transmitter, therefore, has been to understand these relations as a set of networks: transmission networks, but also networks of intergenerational political affiliation. At a moment like the early Occultation period, the stories you repeated *were* your political affiliation. This is to say that *isnād*s must be read not merely as records of knowledge-transmission, nor merely as records of association and affiliation. Instead, they are complex, variegated, and ambiguous records of both aspects. They are at once rhetorical constructs, participating in the creation of ideological arguments, and at the same time they are very often records of actual historical relationships between individuals and groups. That being said, *isnād*s are slippery to deal with for they do not represent a stable epistemological unit of analysis: the links in an *isnād* chain may in one case represent a copying from a book; in another, a teacher–student relationship; in another, a story told within a kin relationship like a father to a son; in another, someone repeating a rumor. While sometimes visible, these nuances appear flattened out and equivalent in each *isnād*. This cannot be avoided: *isnād*s are a means of premodern data-aggregation that often cannot now be unpicked, even with the help of *Rijāl* authors who were attentive to these issues. However, some broad rules can be applied. Thus, the initial steps in a chain, between the event and its eyewitness, and the eyewitness and the report's next transmitter, are much closer to events,

most carefully considered methodology for dealing with networks of Shiʿi hadith transmitters can be seen in Ansari, *L'imamat*. See Seyfeddin Kara, "The Collection of the Qurʾān in the Early Shīʿite Discourse: The Traditions Ascribed to the Fifth Imām Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Bāqir," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, no. 3 (2015): 375–406.

and should be treated as more personally involved in the contents of the narrative (though, of course, it might well be transmitted either in a spirit of veneration or derision). The first people in the chain are more likely to have been involved in a rumor-mill, while later figures in a chain more often appear to represent the activities of serious (I hesitate to say "professional") hadith transmitters, infused with a conservative ethos of preservation of knowledge for Imami or Twelver posterity. Even in the phase of scholarly hadith transmission, although the transmitters were bound by the rules of their discipline, we must not imagine that they transmitted in a totally dispassionate way. Whether reports came directly from the mouth of a living Imam, or were compiled into a treatise on the Occultation after several generations, hadith are part of the representation of Imamic charisma, and thereby an extension of the original act of mediation of charisma to the community carried out by the agents themselves.[70]

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The structure of the chapters in this book is, as far as possible, chronological.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the agents within the context of the political dynamics, institutions, and expectations of the late Imamate. I suggest that the Imamate had become increasingly institutionalized over the century before the Occultation, to the point that the institutions of Imamate could stand in for the Imam by the time of the succession crisis. Chapter 2 describes the troubled state of the Imamate immediately before the Occultation: from the challenges to Imamic authority by "heretics" and renegade agents during the Imamate of the tenth Imam, ʿAlī al-Hādī, to the short and troubled Imamate of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, whose claim was challenged by his brother Jaʿfar "the Liar." Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with the earliest years following the death of Ḥasan. Although organized chronologically, many of the events and actors that appear in these three chapters cannot be clearly dated. However, there is a clear overall pattern of emergence from early confusion to a clearer consensus forming around the Occultation of the hidden Imam and the leadership of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī. Chapter 3 focuses on the crisis that immediately followed the death of the eleventh Imam. Key features of this crisis were

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[70] The process of the *representation* and *mediation* of charisma is a key element that is absent from Weber's original presentation of the concept. See, however, Isaac Reed, "Charismatic Performance: A Study of Bacon's Rebellion," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1 (2013): 254–87.

the dispute over inheriting the Imam's property involving Jaʿfar "the Liar" and Ḥudayth, the mother of the deceased Imam; and the rumors that the dead Imam's heir was still in the womb of his concubine. The agents are more or less invisible in all of these disputes. Chapter 4 details the activities of the earliest named and unnamed agents. I reject the idea that the first canonized envoy, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, was prominently involved as a leader after the death of Ḥasan. Instead, I reflect the earliest sources' emphasis on other agents whose activities were prominent in the first couple of decades following Ḥasan's death. Chapter 5 looks at the figure of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, who seems to have been the first to fulfill the role that was later canonized as "envoy." I discuss the political dynamics surrounding Abū Jaʿfar, in particular, the agents who opposed him, and those who supported him forming the core of the Occultation faction around which the Twelver community would be constituted. I look at the kinds of claims to religiopolitical legitimacy attached to Abū Jaʿfar as fiscal agent, and his position among charismatic claimants to be Gate (*bāb*) to the Imam. Chapter 6 looks at the succession of Ibn Rawḥ to the envoyship, the crisis brought on by Shalmaghānī, and the less dramatic, but equally influential role played by the rise of the scholars and elites who ultimately replaced the centralizing authority of the envoys with their own, more diffuse leadership.

I

The Rise of the Agents in the Late Imamate
(830–874 CE)

EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESSION

What were the beginnings of the central institutions of the Imami Shiʿi Imamate? While they are not identical with the Imamate itself, we must assume that they developed alongside it. By the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, expectations of an unbroken succession of Imams were strong enough that when the Imam died without heir, even the idea of a hidden Imam was preferable to life without an Imam. We cannot trace this kind of expectation of unbroken father-to-son succession back before the sixth Imam of the canonical sequence, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. The history of the emergence of the Imamate as an institution, rather than a theology, has yet to be written, but even using the hints provided by the rather abstract systematizations of succession presented by the heresiographers, we can identify the lifetime of Ṣādiq as crucial. The pivotal role of Ṣādiq's charisma rooted in his wisdom and piety is attested to by both Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi sources which preserve narratives about his life.[1] The Shiʿi heresiographer al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī tells us that after the death of the fifth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the Imam's followers split into two parties. One party followed Bāqir's son Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and the other followed the claim of a man from a different branch of the family, the Ḥasanid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who led a revolt in

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[1] Scholars have agreed that Ṣādiq's Imamate was a foundational moment. See especially, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shîʿa Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 1 (1955): 1–13; Haider, *Origins*; Ansari, *L'imamat*, introduction; Robert Gleave, "Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq," *EIr*.

Medina.[2] It is important to note that this split was not between sons of an "Imam," indicating that later Imami sensibilities about succession as being confined within a canonical lineage were not yet dominant. The field was much wider, including other men of the family of ʿAlī who appeared to be model leaders. The development of the understandings of the Imamate in the second/eighth century is still open to debate. Crone suggests that, as even the sons of Ṣādiq supported the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, this throws doubt on whether they even recognized Ṣādiq's Imamate, while Gleave suggests that Ṣādiq did indeed understand himself to be the legitimate Imam.[3] Although many among the Shiʿa clearly continued to be open to the calls from leaders of various branches of the prophetic family, Imami heresiographical memory indicates that a new conception of Imamic succession had gained traction by the time Ṣādiq died in 148/ 765. Nawbakhtī and Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī enumerate six splits to have emerged after Ṣādiq's death. Central to the formation of these splits are disputes about which of Ṣādiq's sons should be seen as upholding his legacy.[4] This is a new phenomenon. Ṣādiq appears to have inaugurated a new kind of father-to-son Imamate which generated new expectations about succession which thereafter became a distinctive feature of the Imami Imamate. The canonical conception of an unbroken line of Twelve Imams from ʿAlī to the Mahdī is, therefore, historically problematic, and unless talking about canonical Twelver doctrine, historians should quit their bad habit of referring to these twelve men as "the Imams" as if they were Imams all in the same sense. This insight was articulated in 1955 by Hodgson,[5] but still we await a historical study of the emergence of the Imamiyya which ventures beyond doctrinal history. This is not my aim here, but we should understand that the Imamiyya came

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[2] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-dawla li-jamʿiyat al-mustashriqīn al-almāniya, 1350/1931), 53–55.

[3] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 114; Gleave, "Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq," *EIr*.

[4] There is, of course, a problem with relying on heresiographical accounts, in that they tell us relatively little about historical inheritance and succession practices within the ʿAlid clan, and everything about how they were interpreted theologically by the followers of these men, usually retrospectively, though the formulations recorded may preserve earlier positions. Without contrary evidence, however, we may accept the disputes over succession to Ṣādiq as being based on historical events, while the interpretation may often have changed afterward.

[5] See Hodgson's discussion of the *naṣṣ* Imamate, "Early Shîʿa," 10–11. For the intellectual context of the concept of *naṣṣ* designation, see Rodrigo Adem, "Classical *Naṣṣ* Doctrines in Imāmī Shīʿism: On the Usage of an Expository Term," *Shii Studies Review* 1, no. 1–2 (2017): 42–71.

into being gradually, and cannot be said to truly exist as an object of study before Ṣādiq.[6]

Succession between Imams *qua* heads of the family must have been largely based on internal family practice. However, the establishment of the seeds of a stable, heritable Imamate after Ṣādiq was accompanied by the development of a theological definition of Imamate. Thus, it was during the Imamate of Ṣādiq's son Mūsā al-Kāẓim that systematic elaborations of Imamate were produced by thinkers like Hishām b. al-Ḥakam in dialogue with the major intellectual schools present in early ʿAbbasid Iraq.[7] The positions that emerged from these debates formed the foundation of the Imamiyya as a clearly defined *theological* faction. The Imamate came to be defined as an unbroken line, transferred through the *naṣṣ*: the articulation of succession by an Imam (rather than public acclamation) from father to son, in the lineage of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī. It is very likely that the sons of Ṣādiq who were engaged in the dispute over succession asserted their claims in language which shared some of the characteristics of theological discourse; however, the systematic claims that there was an unbroken succession formalized through acts of explicit designation from the time of Muḥammad's designation of ʿAlī through each successive Imam appear to be the product of scholarly elaborations of Imamate, rather than the clan politics.[8] While the partial autonomy of intellectual debates must be acknowledged, it is impossible that Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and his peers could have fabricated the theologized protocols of the Imamate out of whole cloth. We must assume that expectations had existed about succession for a generation or two, becoming sharper in particular at the time of the controversy about succession upon Ṣādiq's death. Here we can make a division between practical inheritance arrangements of the family, and the theological elaboration of these arrangements which must have come afterward. Van Ess suggests that the doctrine of the *naṣṣ* articulation of succession was preceded by the institution of the *waṣiyya* testament,[9] but the extent to which these doctrinal

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[6] Ansari defines the Imamiyya as the followers of Ṣādiq, in particular those who were neither Zaydi nor Wāqifīs who stopped with the Imamate of Kāẓim. *L'imamat, xix.*

[7] Wilferd Madelung, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam," *EI2*; Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, vol. 1, *A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 410–48.

[8] Adem has argued that the appearance of the concept of the *naṣṣ* articulation was a borrowing from inter-sectarian theological and *uṣūlī* debates about hermeneutic methodology for determining the fact of a succession statement. Adem, "*Naṣṣ*."

[9] "The precursor of the *naṣṣ* was the *waṣiyya*, succession based on a testamentary appointment. At first nothing more was probably meant by this than the line of transmission in the family, and certainly not an explicit appointment." Van Ess, *Theology*, 446.

arrangements were indeed rooted in inheritance practices has not be studied. The arguments of theology and the practicalities of familial politics continue to operate side by side over the next several generations of Imams, often with conflicting assumptions. Thus, for example, the increasingly widespread assertion among some Imamis that "there can be no succession between brothers, except in the case of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn" was repeatedly challenged by fraternal claimants to the Imamate from the death of Ṣādiq right up until the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī.[10]

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND PERSONNEL UNDER ṢĀDIQ

Ṣādiq's Imamate was a turning point in ways beyond the institutions and doctrines of succession. Ṣādiq's lifetime seems to have afforded an embryonic moment of mobilization which provided frameworks within which the institutionalization of the Imamate was later to occur. It is during Ṣādiq's lifetime that we first clearly see two key developments. First, he developed a cohort of men who were entrusted with collecting money on his behalf. Mushegh Asatryan has shown how Ṣādiq is depicted as having intentionally surrounded himself with wealthy and influential men, including a group of moneychangers who could get access to large sums when needed.[11] Secondly, the hadith ascribed to Ṣādiq begin to show evidence of a systematic effort to justify the collection of money in the Imam's name through normative legal and exegetical rulings.[12] What did Ṣādiq need to collect money for? The collection of alms taxes such as the *zakāt-ṣadaqa* was potentially a subversive act in its assumption of authority that paralleled that of the state. Sijpesteijn has shown from papyri that *zakāt* was still being actively collected by the state, at least in Egypt, in the early to mid-eighth century.[13] Ṣādiq is usually remembered as a political quietist, though Amikam Elad has discussed some reports that suggest that the authorities viewed him as a threat, in part due to his revenue-collection

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[10] Most notably Jaʿfar "the Liar," the brother of Imam ʿAskarī. See Chapters 2 and 3.

[11] See Mushegh Asatryan, "Bankers and Politics: The Network of Shiʿi Moneychangers in Eighth-Ninth Century Kufa and Their Role in the Shiʿi Community," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7 (2014): 1–21.

[12] See Edmund Hayes, "Alms and the Man: Finance and Resistance in the Legal Statements of the Shiʿi Imams," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 17 (2017): 293–94. Ṣādiq's statements thus contrast with those of his father, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, which are more concerned with the defense of the financial rights of the family of the Prophet more generally.

[13] Petra Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195, 181–214.

activities.[14] Ṣādiq's collection of revenue should perhaps be seen as part of an implicit challenge to the religio-institutional legitimacy of the status quo, and therefore associated with the claims of the broader Hāshimite opposition to the caliphate of the Umayyads, and thereafter the ʿAbbāsids. In addition to fulfilling the functions of a just state in the absence of a just caliph, we may hypothesize that Ṣādiq was interested in furthering his political influence without military ambitions, a motive that would have been furthered by controlling large sums of money (whether for his own use, or for redistribution as alms).

FORMALIZATION OF THE REVENUE-COLLECTION NETWORK AFTER ṢĀDIQ, AND THE DETENTE WITH THE ʿABBĀSIDS

While we have evidence for Ṣādiq having received money from his followers, it is with the Imamate of his son Mūsā al-Kāẓim that we see the fiscal agents play an increasingly important role in the internal politics of the Imamate. When Kāẓim died, a group of his agents refused to recognize his son ʿAlī al-Riḍā as his successor and withheld large sums of money collected in the Imam's name. This shows three things: that Kāẓim had indeed been collecting money from his followers, that he had appointed agents to do so, and that the institutional expectations of the Imamate were such that money collected for one Imam was now being claimed for his successor (rather than, for example, being divided up according to the laws of inheritance, or remaining in the donor-community).[15] The existence of this Wāqifa group that "stopped" at Kāẓim, insisting that he lived on in Occultation as the rightful Imam, is widely attested, and became a standard topic of Shiʿi heresiography. The Wāqifa sect continues to exist as an influential splinter group at least until the fourth/tenth century.[16] The story of the Wāqifī agents withholding money from Riḍā, then, appears to offer a clear corroboration of those hadith reports that indicate the increasing institutionalization of revenue collection.[17] In comparison, we hear no mention of money delivered or withheld as part of the succession

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[14] Amikam Elad, *The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭālibīs and Early ʿAbbāsīs in Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 460–63. More work on the historicity of such reports is required.

[15] This would be a real option given that many funds may have been canonical Islamic duties such as *khums* and *zakāt*, though it is very difficult to know exactly to what extent these categories were stable by this time.

[16] Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the *Wāqifa*," *Arabica* 47 (2000): 95.

[17] Hayes, "Economic Actors."

controversy at the time of Ṣādiq. Riḍā is the subject of a couple of interesting hadith reports in which he is asked for a dispensation from paying dues, a request which he vigorously rejects, reasserting the intergenerational continuity of the fiscal network of the Imamate.[18]

At about the same time that the institutionalization of the fiscal network was proceeding apace under the Imams Kāẓim and Riḍā, a great shift was occurring in ʿAbbasid-Imami relations. Since the ʿAbbasid revolution, which appeared to realize Shiʿi hopes for rule by the family of the Prophet, these hopes had quickly soured as the ʿAbbasids moved to protect their own clan, rather than supporting the claims of any other Hāshimite houses.[19] Although the Imamis are often characterized as politically quietist, this should be considered a characterization best applied to the crystallized classical political theology of the Imami Shiʿa, rather than an obligation that was binding upon the political activity of the historical Imams. Thus, in apparent contrast to the political orientation of Ṣādiq, his son Kāẓim appears to have sympathized with and perhaps encouraged political and military mobilization against the ʿAbbasids,[20] and two of Kāẓim's sons actively led revolts, one in Arabia temporarily succeeding in establishing his rule over a region of Yemen, and another in Basra.[21] If the reports about the activist sympathies of Kāẓim are to be believed,[22] this might explain his particular interest in developing the institutions for the collection of funds. The great shift toward the establishment of a quietist Imamate came thereafter, with another son of Kāẓim, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, who, toward the end of his life, was favored by an ʿAbbasid administration made fragile by the fourth civil war. Riḍā was granted the status of heir apparent by the caliph Maʾmūn (Figure 1), though he died before he was able to succeed to the caliphate.[23] It is perhaps this ʿAbbasid involvement that set

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[18] Ibid.

[19] For a recent treatment of this process, which shows the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya as a turning point in ʿAbbasid-ʿAlid relations, see Deborah G. Tor, "The Parting of Ways between ʿAlid Shiʿism and Abbasid Shiʿism: An Analysis of the Missives between the Caliph al-Manṣūr and Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 209–27.

[20] Etan Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāẓim," *EI2*.

[21] See Robert Gleave, "The Rebel and the Imam: The Uprising of Zayd al-Nār and Shiʿi Leadership Claims," in *The ʿAbbasid and Carolingian Empires*, ed. Deborah G. Tor (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 169–87.

[22] See chapter 3 of Najam Haider, *The Rebel and the Imām in Early Islam: Explorations in Muslim Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Haider argues that depictions of Kāẓim emphasize fear and persecution more in the early Occultation period, in keeping with the zeitgeist, while a more assertive, belligerent side of the Imam's image is highlighted in the more confident atmosphere of the Twelvers during the Buyid era and beyond.

[23] For interpretations of the designation of Riḍā, see Wilferd Madelung, "New Documents concerning al-Maʾmūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl, and ʿAlī al-Riḍā," in *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān ʿAbbās on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: American

Riḍā apart as particularly honored among the descendants of Ṣādiq, and established the prestige of his lineage in contrast to a more belligerent son of Kāẓim like Ibrāhīm "the Butcher." It is notable that Riḍā continued to have particular prestige among Imams,[24] and even up to the time of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī the Imam was known as "Ibn al-Riḍā" at court.[25] Riḍā's son Muḥammad al-Jawād married into the ʿAbbasid family.[26] Though Riḍā and Jawād both appear to have continued collecting money from their followers,[27] it appears less likely that they would have intended to use these

FIGURE 1 Dirham naming of ʿAlī al-Riḍā as heir to ʿAbbasid caliph Maʾmūn

The text of this coin (reverse pictured left) includes "al-Maʾmūn the Caliph . . . ordered by the Prince (*al-amīr*) al-Riḍā / the heir apparent of the Muslims, ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib."[28] The hole pierced in the margin is fairly common, but the positioning suggests it was done with the intention of allowing the Imam's name to hang correctly, suggesting a devotional, rather than purely monetary purpose at some point in its lifespan. This is clear from the fact that, by contrast, the text on the obverse is at right angles to the pendant axis and so would not hang straight. Another dirham of Riḍā, mounted at the same point, has been recently auctioned,[29] suggesting the practice was not isolated, though we cannot tell in which period.

University of Beirut, 1981), 333–46; Deborah G. Tor, "An Historiographical Re-examination of the Appointment and Death of ʿAlī al-Riḍā," *Der Islam* 78, no. 1 (2001): 103–28; Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "Al-Maʾmūn's Choice of ʿAlī al-Riḍā as His Heir," *Islamic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002): 445–68.

[24] See, for example, the particular attention given to the life and sayings of Riḍā by Ibn Bābūya by devoting to him his *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*.

[25] See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–4. Arjomand also notes this, "Crisis," 496.

[26] Shona Wardrop, "The Lives of the Imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād and ʿAlī al-Hādī and the Development of the Shiʿite Organisation" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1988), 31–33.

[27] Hayes, "Economic Actors."

[28] Minted Samarqand, dated 202 AH. The Arabic reads, "li-Allāh / Muḥammad rasūl Allāh / al-Maʾmūn khalīfat Allāh / mimmā amara bihi al-amīr al-Riḍā / walī ʿahd al-muslimīn ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib / Dhū al-Riyāsatayn." Source: American Numismatic Society, http://numismatics.org/collection/1994.76.4.

[29] Auctioned at Leu Numismatik, on August 15, 2020, www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=7237791

funds in opposing the ʿAbbasids, given their improved relations with the rulers.

During the new phase of accommodation with the ʿAbbasids, the Imams still continued to collect funds, which may have led to an accumulation of capital within the community which was no longer directed toward active political mobilization. We can see this pivot toward accommodation as the foundational moment in the creation of a quietist, increasingly internalized Shiʿi community in which revenues were collected, and perhaps, instead of being intended to further a mobilization against the government, were channeled back to members of the community itself. At the same time, some followers of the Imams were visible as courtiers at the ʿAbbasid court.[30] Shiʿi courtiers continued to be influential in shaping the Imami community well into the Occultation era.[31]

CHILD IMAMS, ELITE KINGMAKERS, AND ʿABBASID INTERVENTIONS IN SUCCESSION

While the idea of succession to Imamate by *waṣiyya* testament or *naṣṣ* designation placed agency in the hand of the incumbent Imam to determine his successor, in effect, it also placed a great onus on the acclamation of the new Imam by the elite of the Shiʿa. Without followers, a member of the family of the Prophet could hardly be considered as an Imam. The process of acclamation of a new Imam was no simple matter, usually involving, since the time of Ṣādiq, several competing candidates, who relied on their supporters for making the case of their Imamate to the wider community.[32]

[30] A systematic study of Shiʿi bureaucrats is yet to be carried out, though several works have dealt with aspects of this issue. See Arjomand, "Crisis"; Wardrop, "Lives"; Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise on the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government (*Masʾala fī ʾl-ʿamal maʿa ʾl-sulṭān*)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 18–31; ʿAbbās Iqbāl, *Khāndān-i nawbakhtī* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi tahūrī, 1345/1966).

[31] Hossein Modarressi, *Taṭawwur al-mabānī al-fikriyya li-l-tashayyuʿ fī al-qurūn al-thalātha al-ūlā* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, n.d.), 277–300.

[32] See, for example, Van Ess's discussion of the succession of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, *Theology*, 403.

The accession of Muḥammad al-Jawād marked a turning point, for Jawād was a child when he acceded to the Imamate.[33] His accession, therefore, was, by necessity, supervised by the Shiʿi elite, and was, furthermore, under the surveillance of the ʿAbbasid caliph. An elite group of Shiʿa was instrumental in furthering the claims of the child Jawād against rivals such as his paternal uncle.[34] The existence of claims by the Imam's uncle were later considered distasteful to Imami orthodoxy, and were edited out or supplemented by canonizing statements of doctrine.[35] Imami scholars can also be seen to play a role in testing and selecting an Imam, an event that occurs in reports up till and including the occurrence of the Occultation.[36]

In her unjustly neglected dissertation, Shona Wardrop suggests that ʿAbbasid political interference is visible in reports surrounding the accession of Jawād to the Imamate, an event that is associated with the return of the caliph Maʾmūn to Baghdad, after the civil war. Having designated Jawād's father, Riḍā, as heir to the caliphate, it is unsurprising that he should take an interest in the son:

It was only some two or three years after the death of al-Riḍā and one year after al-Maʾmūn had arrived in Baghdād from where he sent for the child to come and live at court under supervision, that al-Jawād's claim to the Imāmate became openly acknowledged. As one source bluntly puts it, he remained hidden with the Imāmate until this time.[37]

Although Wardrop highlights the role of ʿAbbasid influence she does not make the explicit case that the designation of Jawād as Riḍā's heir might also have been part of a conscious policy on the part of the caliph. But it would not be far-fetched to speculate that Maʾmūn called for the boy to Baghdad as a continuation of his previous policy; now grooming an alternate candidate for Imamate to balance the appeal of the ʿAlid revolutionaries of the day. Jawād, like his father, married an ʿAbbasid princess while still a child,[38] which would seem to suggest an attempt to establish an ongoing dynastic connection. However, the cordial relations between Jawād and the ʿAbbasids does imply certain contradictions. During his Imamate, Jawād continued to command agents to collect money from his

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[33] Arjomand, "Crisis," 497; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 62–63; Wardrop, "Lives," 26–30.
[34] "The group gathered at the meeting represented a cross section of the Shīʿite Aṣḥāb: Al-Rayyān b. al-Ṣalṭ, Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā, Muḥammad b. Ḥakīm, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Al-Ḥajjāj, Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān." Wardrop, "Lives," 6; see also ibid., 17.
[35] Ibid., 7–9.   [36] See Chapter 4.   [37] Wardrop, "Lives," 4.   [38] Ibid., 31–32.

followers, activity that would seem to suggest an implicit subversion of the ʿAbbasid right to rule and collect canonical Islamic revenues.[39] The institutional dynamics of a quietist Imamate were complex, contingent upon particular political circumstances, and cannot be summarized simply as being either pro- or anti-ʿAbbasid.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE IMAMATE

In spite of its challenges, the institutionalization of Imamate proceeded apace during the Imamate of Hādī. In a statement from Hādī about his inheritance from his father, we can see a clue to this process of institutionalization:

It was transmitted from Abū ʿAlī b. Rāshid, who said:

I said to Abū al-Ḥasan the third [Hādī] (AS): "[If] we are brought something and told, 'This was the property of Abū Jaʿfar [Jawād] (AS), according to us,' in that case, what should we do?"

And [Hādī] said: "What belonged to Abū Jaʿfar [Jawād] (AS) because of Imamate, then that belongs to me, and anything else is inheritance (*mīrāth*) according to the Book of God and the example (*sunna*) of his Prophet (SAAA)."[40]

Hādī articulates here a conceptual distinction between the Imam as a private person and the Imam as a representative of the Imamate. As a private person, the Imam's property is subject to the regular laws of inheritance. The property he controls as Imam, however, is not to be divided at his death. This can be seen as a response to the kind of troubles that emerged upon the death of Kāẓim, when the Wāqifī agents appropriated the revenues collected in the Imam's name.[41] This statement suggests that Imamic revenues should not be removed from the Imamate, even upon the death of the incumbent. The precise legal mechanism for passing

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[39] In a letter preserved by Ṭūsī, Jawād ordered his followers in the Jibāl to send him the fifth of the booty (*khums*) from a battle against the "heretical" *khurramiyya*. Edmund Hayes, "Between Implementation and Legislation: The Shiʿi Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād's *Khums* Demand Letter of 220 AH/835 CE," *Islamic Law and Society* 28 No. 4 (2021); Modarressi, *Crisis*, 12; Hussain, *Occultation*, 47.

[40] Ibn Bābūya, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Qumm: Jamāʿat al-mudarrisīn fī al-ḥawza al-ʿilmiyya fī qumm al-muqaddasa, 1392/1972–73), 2:43–44.

[41] Abu ʿAmr Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. Mahdī al-Rijāʾī (Qumm: Muʾassasat āl al-bayt, 1404/1983–84), 2:758–61.

down Imamic property is not specified here, but it is likely that it was accomplished by a mixture of *waqf* endowments (which are mentioned as an important part of the revenues of Imamate in the early Occultation period) and *waṣiyya* bequest (which becomes significant in the contest over the property of Imamate between al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's brother and his mother, addressed below). By the death of Ḥasan, then, there had emerged a legal conception of the Imamate, which was sufficiently depersonalized to allow for the institutional perpetuation of the Imami community into the Occultation era.

IDENTIFYING AGENTS IN THE SOURCES

It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when agents became an influential force in the Imami community. In Kashshī's *Rijāl*, the key source for pre-Occultation agents, we see the first mention of the word *wakīl* in relation to the death of Kāẓim and the revolt of the Wāqifī agents.[42] Under Riḍā the agents continue to be mentioned, but it is really at the time of Hādī that they become prominent protagonists playing out the drama of the Imamate, with disputes raging about which figures in the community should be praised and which vilified.[43] It is with the Imamate of Hādī that the Imam's explicit identification of someone as an agent becomes the driving motivation for preserving a report. This interest in the appointment of agents suggests that occupying the office of agent had become a source of prestige over and above the mere fact of being a follower of the Imam. Kashshī mentions three cases of designation to the agentship,[44] and each of these appears to be an epistolary response to some dispute regarding authority, in two cases a confusion over who is the official agent designated by the Imam,[45] and in the third case, apparently a report tailored to meet anxieties over the role of a eunuch as agent.[46]

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[42] Instead, they claimed that Kāẓim had not died and was the Qāʾim, implying a kind of Occultation, ibid., 2:758–61. For a study of the Wāqifa, see Buyukkara, "Schism."

[43] See, for example, the controversy over al-Faḍl b. Shādhān. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:817–22; Tamima Bayhom-Daou, "The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (2001): 188–207.

[44] Limited by using only those reports which explicitly mention the word *wakīl*.

[45] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:847, 868.   [46] Ibid., 867.

These designation reports indicate that an agent's authority ideally stemmed from the Imams: the transmitters of such reports were clearly interested in preserving a record of whoever acted as an Imam's agent so as to assess purported Imamic utterances as they were issued, and for posterity. Imams were clearly involved in appointing agents to serve as their intermediaries in various communities, and in balancing between the ambitions of rival agents in these communities.[47] However, in some cases we also see that appointment to the position of agent rested with local communities who commissioned their agents to represent them to the Imams, rather than vice versa. This is the case with the delegation of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq to examine Jaʿfar "the Liar," a case we will examine in the following chapters. In such cases, we see that a group from a local community commission a man or men to carry their money, gifts, and letters to the Imams, with terms like "delegation" (*wafd*) and "courier" (*rasūl*) being used. In some cases, it seems that an Imam struggled to prevent his followers from choosing a representative who was distasteful to him, and in these cases, we see Imams using circuitous methods to ensure support for a favored candidate.[48]

SCHOLARS VERSUS THE IMAM

Arjomand, Modarressi, Wardrop, and Takim all tend to conflate the authority of the agents with the authority of the scholars. It is true that our sources sometimes talk about a corporate group of Shiʿi elite followers with terms like "companions" (*aṣḥāb*), "notables" (*wujūh*), or some phrase approximating to "the party" (*al-ʿiṣāba*, *al-jamāʿa*, *al-ṭāʾifa*). Certainly, a single man sometimes played both the role of a scholar and author of books and an agent, as in the case of ʿAlī b. Mahziyār. However, the two roles were not identical, and scholars and agents interacted with the Imams in different capacities, and projected their authority as Imamic representatives in different ways. There had long been a tension between the authority of the Imam and the independent scholarly authority of Shiʿi scholars. Prominent followers of the Imams who were scholars in

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[47] See the crisis between Fāris b. Ḥātim and his rival in Chapter 2.
[48] Perhaps the most instructive case in which the mechanisms of Imamic control are laid bare is the excommunication of the renegade agent Fāris b. Ḥātim, which we will deal with in Chapter 2. See Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been"; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 72.

their own right, like Zurāra b. Aʿyan at the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq, could even disagree with the Imams on legal and theological points.[49] The tension between scholars and Imams evolved as the Imami scholarly community crystallized. The existence of a stable and heritable Imamate which claimed to represent God's divine guidance spurred the preservation in the form of hadith of the precious Imamic judgments on law, theology, Qurʾānic exegesis, and a myriad of other topics. The preservation of Imamic rulings as hadith had the effect of narrowing the scope for the authority of living Imams, and established the scholars as touchstones for determining whether candidates for Imamate were fit for purpose, as we will see in the Qummī delegation's testing of Jaʿfar "the Liar."[50] Though the scholars clearly aimed to shore up their Imam, they also had the potential to become a centrifugal force in the community, eroding the authority of the incumbent Imam in favor of their own knowledge preserved from earlier Imams, especially the prestigious Bāqir and Ṣādiq.

CONCLUSION

The history of the emergence of the historical Imamate, and therefore the institutions surrounding it, are still obscure, and relatively untouched by scholarship, with the notable exception of Modarressi's very condensed treatment in *Crisis and Consolidation*. Nonetheless, we can trace the broad outlines of the processes of institutionalization and consolidation, as the heritable Imamate was accepted and became in entrenched in the minds, the lives, and the behaviors of an emerging Imami community. In understanding the agents within this development, it is important to separate out the different roles played by the various followers of the Imams. Hitherto, there has been a tendency to conflate these followers as a bloc of men (*rijāl*). I have argued that we must distinguish between different roles, in particular between scholars and agents, even though these roles sometimes overlapped. Unlike scholars, the prestige and authority of the agents rested upon the fiscal institutions of the Imamate: the systems for collecting the canonical alms taxes, the *zakāt* and the *khums*, which were instrumental in

[49] Van Ess notes several topics on which Zurāra differed from Bāqir. *Theology*, 382. See Etan Kohlberg on interpreting the tensions between Zurāra and the Imams, "Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period, " in *Authority and Political Culture in Shiʾism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 35–37.

[50] See Chapter 4 and Wardrop, "Lives," 7–9.

ritually and materially connecting the community with their Imams. Although the precise origins of an institutionalized Imamate are unclear, by the time of the tenth Imam, legal conventions and institutional protocols for defining the Imamate and its operations had emerged, setting the scene for the contestations of the Occultation era.

2

The Crisis before the Crisis

The Feud between Imamic Contenders and the Power of the Agents

The magnification of the role of the agents during the Occultation period has certain precedents in the lifetimes of the tenth and eleventh Imams. These Imams' enforced isolation from their followers in the ʿAbbasid capital of Samarra perhaps made direct control of the community's affairs difficult, while, however, placing them geographically closer to many of their followers. The isolation of the Imams may have confirmed the centrifugal forces which diffused Imamic authority into the hands of their representatives who had been invested with the work of the Imamate. The local power base of Imamic representatives gave them the ability to represent both political and doctrinal authority sometimes, but not always, in support of the Imam in Samarra. In such fragile circumstances, the eruption of a bitter succession dispute between two sons of ʿAlī al-Hādī – al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and Jaʿfar "the Liar" – generated a feud which was to resurface after Ḥasan's death as a fundamental flaw that defined the Imami Shiʿa as they entered the Occultation era. The bitter rivalry between the brothers pitted their followers against each other. For example, the canonical first envoy, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, was prominent during this time as an agent of Hādī, and he participated in the conflicts between loyalist and renegade agents. This made any armistice after Ḥasan's death very difficult. In this chapter we will investigate this Imamic succession dispute, the role of the agents, and how these events influenced the dynamics of Imamic authority immediately before the Occultation period.

SPLENDID ISOLATION? THE IMAMS HĀDĪ AND ʿASKARĪ

ʿAbbasid surveillance of the Imami Imams continued until the era of the Occultation. We are told that Jawād (b. 195/811) spent his early life near

Medina, but was called to Baghdad by Maʾmūn to consummate his marriage
to the caliph's daughter in 215/830, and his presence was again demanded in
Baghdad by the next caliph, al-Muʿtaṣim, in 220/835.[1] His successors, Hādī
and ʿAskarī, were called to live at the caliphal capital of Samarra, and ended
their lives under ʿAbbasid surveillance.[2] They came to be known as "the two
of the military cantonment" (al-ʿaskarīyayn). During their residence in
Samarra it seems that these Imams were curtailed in their contacts with
their followers. The Nuṣayrī author Khaṣībī even quotes a report in which
Hādī is referred to as being hidden from his followers as a precedent for
Occultation of the twelfth Imam:

Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Ḥasanī said about Abū al-Ḥasan Ṣāḥib al-ʿAskar [Hādī]
that he was hidden from many of his Shīʿa except for his special retainers (khawāṣṣ)
and when the Imamate (amr) passed to Abū al-Ḥasan he addressed his special
retainers and others from behind the curtain (satr), except for the times in which
he would ride to the house of the sultan [i.e. the caliph] and that was but a prelude
for the ghayba of the Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān).[3]

This quotation indicates the obstacles which ʿAbbasid surveillance created
for the Imam's ability to communicate with his community, and the way
this difficulty was interpreted by subsequent generations as a sign of the
coming era of Occultation. That Hādī's only public appearances are said to
be when he used to ride to court seems to fit the long-term pattern of
ʿAbbasid intervention and control. ʿAbbasid surveillance, however, cannot
explain the depiction of the Imam as remaining behind a curtain to speak
to his followers (Figure 2).[4] Instead this bespeaks a mechanism for the

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[1] Wilferd Madelung, "Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Riḍā," EI2; Wardrop, "Lives," 26–33.
[2] Wilferd Madelung, "ʿAlī al-Hādī," EIr; H. Halm, "ʿAskarī, Abū Moḥammad Ḥasan b. ʿAlī,"
     EIr.
[3] Khaṣībī, Hidāya, 267. It is interesting that Ithbāt al-waṣiyya, which appears to have been
     produced within a similar interpretive milieu as Khaṣībī's Hidāya (focused on the perennial
     structures of Imamic initiation throughout hierohistory), also carries exactly the same idea
     that the Imamate of Hādī was a prelude to the Occultation, due to his isolation from his
     followers, during which he spoke behind a curtain, and was only seen by the elite retainers
     (khawāṣṣ) or when riding to the sultan. Pseudo-Masʿūdī, Ithbāt, 286.
[4] Portrait of the wise Sasanian king Anushirwān, from a copy of the Shāhnāma (Book of Kings)
     by Firdawsī (d. 1019 or 1025). This image is much later than our period, but the iconog-
     raphy of the haloed wise ruler surrounded by his close companions would have been
     intelligible to ninth-century Imamis. This comes from an Ilkhanid-period manuscript,
     produced in Persia around 1330–35 CE. Image provided open access by Cleveland
     Museum of Art, https://clevelandart.org/art/1959.330. For links between prophets,
     Imams, sages and kings, see Edmund Hayes, "Early Islamic Cosmopolitanism?
     Constructing the ʾUmma of India in Pre-Mongol Muslim Scholarship," special issue on
     "Iranian Cosmopolitanisms," Comparative Islamic Studies 13, no. 1–2 (2017): 75–120.

FIGURE 2 The wise king behind a curtain

performance of charisma:[5] a strategy borrowed from court protocol[6] to ensure that the Imams remained an object of awe and were treated with proper respect.

The difficulty in accessing the Imam inevitably created a bottleneck in communications, placing further authority into the hands of those who mediated the charisma of the Imam, a process evident since the accession of Jawād as a minor. Authority was increasingly diffused downward from the Imam himself and placed in the hands of his agents. This must have been an important factor in the succession disputes. Though the Imams

[5] See Reed, "Charismatic Performance"; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), esp. 135–50.
[6] See, for example, Richard Ettinghausen, "The Throne and Banquet House of Khirbat al-Mafjar," in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Jonathan Bloom (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 283–332.

certainly attempted to control their agents, the diffusion of authority into the hands of the agents created incentives and opportunities for agents to form their own independent power bases.

As direct Imamic influence retracted during the Imamate of Hādī we see the rise of men claiming charismatic authority for themselves as Gates (*bāb*) to the Imam. Ṭūsī, in his chapter dedicated to this subject, looks back on this period and suggests that the first to claim *bābiyya* was Sharīʿī,[7] a "heretic" who emerged during the Imamate of Hādī, and whose legacy was claimed by Ibn Nuṣayr and Shalmaghānī later:

[Sharīʿī] was one of the companions of Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī], and then al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī] after him (AS). He was the first who claimed a position which God had not appointed him to, and for which he was not fit, and he lied against God and against His proofs (*ḥujaj*)[8] (AS), and he connected to them what does not pertain to them and what they are free from (*barrāʾ*), and the Shiʿa cursed him and disassociated from him, and the rescript (*tawqīʿ*) of the Imam came out to curse him and excommunicate him (*barāʾa*).[9]

Ṭūsī's comment here is not entirely clear. On the face of it, Sharīʿī appears to be only one in a long line of men to have claimed unsanctioned authority while making assertions about the divine nature of the Imams.[10] However,

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[7] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 246–47.   [8] I.e. the Imams and prophets.   [9] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 246–47.
[10] Kashshī, for example, notes that Sharīʿī himself was a student of ʿAlī b. Ḥasaka, implying a continuing chain of authority from the past. Kashshī also describes other men as claiming Gatehood from this same circle. Thus, Muḥammad b. Furāt claimed Gatehood at the time of Riḍā, and he is also compared with ʿAlī b. Ḥasaka and Sharīʿī. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:829–30. The early Shiʿi esoterists emphasized Salmān al-Fārisī's role as *bāb*, sometimes referring to him as the Gate of God and sometimes the Gate of ʿAlī. Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1982), 108–9, 129–30, 172. More work is needed on the meanings and instantiations of the claim to be *bāb* in the various strands of Shiʿism, and their interaction. Tendler Krieger has made an important contribution in tracing Nuṣayrī conceptions of the activities of earlier *bāb*-like figures, Bella Tendler Krieger, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ and the Role of the Nuṣayrī Bāb: Rehabilitating the Heresiarchs of the Islamic Tradition," in *L'Ésotérisme shiʿite, ses racines et ses prolongements: Shiʿi Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Maria De Cillis, Daniel De Smet, and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 441–72. Asatryan has described the conception of *bāb* among the Kufan estoterist circles inherited by the Nuṣayrīs, *Controversies*, 111–16. See also Denis McEoin, "*Bāb*," *EIr*. Al-Ṣaffār, in his *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, includes a whole chapter on the Imams being God's *ḥujaj* and *bāb*s. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā

the report is followed by an oblique clarification regarding the nature of the claims made by the *bāb*s of the time of Hādī and ʿAskarī:

> And all of those imposters initially only lied about the Imam and that they were his agents (*wukalāʾ*). Then they claimed a magnification of this doctrine to their followers, after which their case escalates to the claim of *ḥallājiyya* [i.e. personal embodiment of divinity].[11]

While doctrinal heterodoxy had existed earlier, perhaps the claimants to Gatehood during the life of Hādī, then, were distinctive in that some of them emerged from the ranks of the Imamic agents. If so, this would again suggest the prestige of the agentship, and the inextricable links between bureaucratic and charismatic authority in this context. However, we must be careful about how we understand this statement. For Ṭūsī, the identification of the emergence of the *bāb*s under Hādī clearly functions to provide a genealogy for more recent heretics like Ḥallāj and Shalmaghānī with their radical claims for themselves as vessels of the Divine. Nonetheless, we can perhaps take at face value the idea that there was something unprecedented in the scale and nature of the claims to Gatehood during the Imamate of Hādī and ʿAskarī, which is borne out by Khaṣībī's comment about the "Occultation" of Hādī.

SUCCESSION CRISIS

The Occultation crisis was directly preceded by the controversy over who should succeed Hādī. Hādī initially designated as successor his eldest son, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad. He, however, predeceased his father. The death of the heir apparent precipitated a feud between two surviving sons, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and Jaʿfar "the Liar."[12] Although Ḥasan came to be accepted as the eleventh Imam by a majority of the Imamiyya,[13] his feud with Jaʿfar dogged his Imamate, and Jaʿfar's cause gained great momentum when Ḥasan died after only six years as Imam. The premature death of Abū

Muḥsin Kūchabāghī (Tehran: Muʾassasat al-aʿlamī, 1404/1983–84), 81–83. For the Fatimids, the word *bāb* came to be used as one of the fixed ranks of the Ismaili hierarchy. Farhad Daftary and Rahim Gholami, "Bāb," *Encyclopaedia Islamica*. See also Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. 4 Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-nahḍa, 1389/1969), 1:82–84.

[11] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 247.

[12] For a fuller treatment of the dispute, see Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

[13] It is always dangerous to make statements about the relative demographic ratios of different Shiʿi groups, but all reports do seem to suggest this.

Jaʿfar Muḥammad[14] created both doctrinal and political problems, reigniting controversies that had raged several generations earlier when Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's designee, Ismāʿīl, had predeceased him. Many refused to accept the idea that the Imam's designation could be changed. The idea expressed in the term *badāʾ*, that God could change His mind about His choice, was still deeply controversial, even though it had gained some acceptance at the time of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[15] Three distinct camps began to form: a handful upheld the Imamate of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad and denied his death, claiming he had gone into Occultation and was the messianic Mahdī;[16] a majority transferred their allegiance to Ḥasan, the favored choice of the loyalist agents; and some transferred their allegiance to Jaʿfar "the Liar."[17] It seems clear that before Ḥasan's death, Jaʿfar had just an outside chance at the Imamate: his only significant base of support came from the followers of the renegade agent Fāris b. Ḥātim, who had been accused of claiming to be the Gate to the Imam.

FĀRIS B. ḤĀTIM: THE RENEGADE AGENT

The strange case of Fāris b. Ḥātim al-Qazwīnī[18] encapsulates several of the structural and political challenges intrinsic to the late Imamate: family struggles within the Imamic family; the threat from heterodox claims to *bābiyya*; and attempts to gain local control of the Imamic revenues. The Imam's response to Fāris makes visible how communication networks limited the Imam's ability to set the agenda among his ostensible followers.

Fāris was from Qazwīn, but like many of the men who handled the Imam's revenues, he operated in Samarra. He had acted as the agent of Imam Hādī, collecting money, presumably from his fellow Qazwīnīs, and

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[14] One transmitter states that, "I had transmitted many indicators from Abū al-Ḥasan (AS) regarding his son [Abū Jaʿfar] Muḥammad, and when he died I settled into perplexity and I was afraid to write about that, not knowing what would happen, so I wrote [to Hādī] to ask a petition (*duʿāʾ*)." Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, 260–61. Though some sources deny the historicity of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad's designation, including the assertion that Ḥasan was the eldest son, not Muḥammad (Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:326), there must have at least been extremely strong expectations that Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad was to succeed to the Imamate, otherwise the literature justifying the succession of Ḥasan against Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad in the first place would not have been generated. Such reports only make sense in a polemical context in which there had been strong indications that Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad would succeed.

[15] Wilferd Madelung, "*Badāʾ*," *EIr*; I. Goldziher and A. S. Tritton, "*Badāʾ*," *EI2*.

[16] Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehran: Muʾassasa-i maṭbūʿātī-i ʿaṭāʾī, 1383/1963), 101.

[17] Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 79.   [18] See Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

from adjacent regions in the Jibāl.[19] By the time of the death of Hādī's son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad, Fāris had already turned renegade.[20] In Kashshī's *Rijāl* the controversy is depicted as beginning the moment when Fāris ceased to send the dues he had collected to the Imam. When Hādī learned that Fāris had been misappropriating funds owed to the Imamate, he wrote to others in the Jibāl, appointing an alternative agent to send their dues to. This does not seem to have worked: people kept bringing money to Fāris, and the Imam had to send a series of increasingly severe letters regarding Fāris, who was cursed and then excommunicated.[21] Finally, with few effective tools of coercion at his disposal, the Imam called upon an assassin to rid himself of this troublesome agent. Fāris was killed with a meat cleaver as he left the mosque between the prayers of *maghrib* and *ʿishāʾ*,[22] and the assassin was rewarded with a lifetime stipend.[23]

Even after the assassination, Fāris's supporters continued to be a thorn in the side of the Imamate. It seems that they had backed Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad as Imam, but when he predeceased his father, they backed Jaʿfar instead of turning, as most did, to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. Ḥasan's Imamate was then dogged by the derisive opposition of Fāris's supporters, who claimed that Ḥasan did not have sufficient knowledge to be Imam, and called his supporters the "Donkey Faction."[24] Ḥasan, then, was found wanting with regards to his knowledge, prefiguring the testing of Jaʿfar "the Liar."[25]

It is, perhaps, a sign of the initial weakness of Jaʿfar's credentials that it was only Fāris's followers who supported him for Imam upon the death of Hādī. Fāris's legacy was taken up by his sister, who is said to have rallied his supporters to the cause of Jaʿfar upon the death of Ḥasan.[26] Establishment forces appear to have lined up behind Ḥasan, in spite of certain questions about his fitness for the office of Imam. In contrast, Jaʿfar's claim was weakened by his tolerance for Fāris and his followers. The theologian Ibn

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[19] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:808–9.

[20] For the complicated chronology, see Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

[21] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:808–9.   [22] Ibid., 807–8.

[23] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:524; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 72–73.

[24] Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, part 3, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Sallūm al-Samarrāʾī, appended to his *al-Ghuluww wa-l-firaq al-ghāliya fī al-ḥaḍāra al-islāmiyya* (Baghdad: Dār al-ḥurriyya li-l-ṭibāʿa, 1392/1972), 291.

[25] See Chapter 4.

[26] In doing so, she participated in an uneasy pro-Jaʿfar alliance between those who rejected Ḥasan's Imamate, and those who accepted it. al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ṣubḥī al-Khiḍr al-Ḥimṣī (Beirut: Sharikat al-aʿlamī li-al-maṭbūʿāt, 2011 [hereafter: Beirut ed.]), 82.

Qiba later used this against Jaʿfar in an early Occultation-era tract, noting that Jaʿfar had attempted to whitewash the reputation of a man that Hādī had cursed.[27] Crucially, for Occultation-era politics, Jaʿfar's alignment with Fāris made it extremely difficult for established agents who had sided with Hādī and Ḥasan to support Jaʿfar even after Ḥasan's death. Jaʿfar's association with Fāris appears to have to have alienated Hādī's agents from him. The involvement of the agent ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī is a case in point. Kashshī reports that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd ordered the cursing of Fāris, and instructed that Imamic revenues be delivered to himself instead of Fāris.[28] As Modarressi suggested,[29] once he had cursed Fāris, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's continuing opposition to Jaʿfar was almost inevitable, even after Ḥasan had died and Jaʿfar was the obvious visible candidate for the Imamate. It is important to note that, while Twelver posterity tends to treat Fāris as a heretic in doctrinal terms, the role of money can be seen clearly in the early treatments of his betrayal, and those who are pitted against Fāris, like ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and the agent Ayyūb b. Nūḥ,[30] are the same men who assert their control of the funds that Fāris had attempted to appropriate. It is likely that while doctrinal heterodoxy could be tolerated, when joined with a political-financial challenge like Fāris's, it had to be rooted out with stern resolve.

SUPPORTERS AND CHALLENGERS TO AL-ḤASAN AL-ʿASKARĪ

Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī inherited the difficulties of Hādī's Imamate, but brought his own problems, including the accusations of insufficient knowledge leveled at him by Jaʿfar's supporters; doubt regarding his succession; and the issue of his lack of male offspring to continue the legacy. Pseudo-Masʿūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* preserves legitimist defenses of the Imamate of Ḥasan that clearly indicate the ongoing doubts among his followers regarding his succession. These doubts were clearly linked to the designation and death of his elder brother. In one account, Ḥasan was forced to make dire threats to one of his followers who wrote asking for confirmation of his legitimacy:

Hārūn b. Muslim said: I and a group wrote to Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī] (AS) after the death of Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] and we asked him about the legatee (*waṣī*) of his father. And he wrote to us:

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[27] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 56–57; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 153, 164.   [28] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:809.
[29] Modarressi, *Crisis*, 76.   [30] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:808–9.

"I have understood what you have mentioned, and if you continue to be in doubt up until this time, then that is the greatest calamity (*al-muṣība al-ʿuẓmā*)! I am his legatee (*waṣī*) and your master (*ṣāḥib*) after him (AS), by oral designation (*bi-mushāfaha*) from the deceased; I witness to that [by] God (AJ) and His angels and those close to Him (*awliyāʾ*). And if you doubt after you have seen my handwriting and heard my speech, then you have erred in your lot and mislaid the way."[31]

It is worth emphasizing the importance of epistolary communications here. The Imam continued to rely on letters, and therefore also letter-carriers, to establish his authority to his community. The visual recognition of his handwriting is important, as is the efficacy of the solemn oaths sworn by the Imam in his letter, oaths which are comparable to other binding written commitments from the era.[32]

As we have seen, Hādī faced challenges from *bābī* claimants to authority, but it was not just the *bābī* esoterists who appeared as challengers to the authority of Ḥasan. Kashshī's *Rijāl* also preserves the controversy between the Imam and the Nishapuri scholar and jurist Faḍl b. Shādhān, which has been carefully studied by Bayhom-Daou. In an exchange of letters between members of the Nishapuri community and the Imam, it is suggested that Faḍl, although staunchly anti-*ghuluww*, may have opposed Ḥasan's Imamate and prevented the sending of dues to him, or at least was accused of such a position.[33] While Faḍl was accepted as an orthodox Imami by posterity, there is no reason to doubt that he may have had such problems with Ḥasan's Imamate or refused to send funds. Faḍl's position on the non-miraculous nature of Imamic knowledge is particularly significant to note in this regard, given the accusations which were being made regarding Ḥasan's own lack of knowledge.

Ḥasan's difficulties were compounded by his lack of an heir. Given his young age of around twenty years on his accession to the Imamate, it may perhaps have been premature to doubt him due to his inability to produce male offspring. One might suspect that accusations of infertility were derived from post-Occultation polemics against the hidden Imam.

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[31] Transmitted by Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh, Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, 261.

[32] Compare the common habit in oaths of swearing to God and the angels as one's witness; see Andrew Marsham and Chase Robinson, "The Safe-Conduct for the Abbasid ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī (d. 764)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, no. 2 (2007): 247–81.

[33] Bayhom-Daou, "The Imam's Knowledge," 198–203. Bayhom-Daou does not discuss the question of Faḍl's alleged role in the withholding of funds from the Imam, but this is clearly present in one of the reports presented in Kashshī, *Rijāl*.

However, it is very possible that even during his Imamate he proved himself to be infertile. Certainly, Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī indicates that Ḥasan's opponents had brought up the question of his infertility already at the death of Hādī.[34] For a system built on patrilineal succession, the guarantee of male heirs was, of course, no small concern, and so it makes sense that his childlessness, even in his early twenties, might have been cause for concern. Stories of the procurement of concubines for him[35] indicate that there was no problem of sourcing potential mates.

CONCLUSION

Hādī's long Imamate was defined in its final years by a series of challenges in which the specter of heterodoxy and the threat of institutional insiders was combined, most especially in the case of Fāris b. Ḥātim, who posed such a threat that Hādī ordered his assassination. These destabilizing factors were compounded with the succession dispute that erupted even before Hādī had passed away. Amid this, when al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī acceded to the Imamate, he was accused by his opponents of lacking the requisite knowledge to be an Imam, dogged by his infertility, and opposed by his brother, Jaʿfar. The dispute over Imamic succession generated a feud which was to continue after Ḥasan's death and create a fundamental flaw between pro-Jaʿfar and anti-Jaʿfar camps that split the family of the Imams itself, as well as their followers, and came to define the early development of the Twelver Occultation narratives.

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[34] Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, 110.
[35] His aunt Ḥakīma is depicted as having procured the concubine who was to bear the twelfth Imam for him. See, for example, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264.

3

Crisis!

The Mother, the Brother, the Concubine, and the Politics of Inheritance

The Imami Shiʿa were keenly interested in the rituals accompanying the death of an Imam. The way they were carried out was also watched by the ʿAbbasid authorities and courtiers, and the public at large. Events were scrutinized for their fulfillment or violation of protocol and symbolism. Such interest was by no means unprecedented, but the crisis in the Imamic family upon the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī meant that the performance of these rituals was particularly significant. The nature of the Occultation doctrine and the polemics surrounding it meant that preserving the reports generated around these events continued to be important in the decades that followed, leading to the generation and preservation of a little constellation of accounts in canonical Twelver sources and non-Twelver heresiographies. The polemical generation and reproduction of these reports muddies our vision of what exactly happened. Nonetheless, from the very high importance assigned to reports about funerary rites in various sources, we can suppose that at the time, as well as in memory, the first twenty-four hours after the death of the eleventh Imam were crucial moments for the key actors to establish facts on the ground that significantly shaped events to come. A number of key rituals are mentioned in our sources, including washing the Imam's corpse, praying over him, and showing his face to those gathered at the funeral. These reports tap into webs of social, political, and theological meaning and precedent that had

built up around the practice and discourses accompanying the death and succession of an Imam over several generations, indeed back to the crisis of the death of the Prophet Muḥammad.[1]

Among the Shiʿa, reports generated about the funerary rituals associated with earlier Imams and Prophets[2] had crystallized into topoi and had become the subject of theological and legal debates. By the late third/ninth century, the preparation of an Imam's corpse had come to have precise implications within Shiʿi discourse. Kulaynī devotes a chapter of his *Kāfī* to hadith establishing that an Imam's corpse must be washed only by an Imam,[3] despite cases in which an Imam had not been washed by his successor. The seventh canonical Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, for example, famously died in prison, creating theological-political problems for the Imami theology of succession. The Wāqifa had used Mūsā's death in prison as a means of attacking Mūsā's successor, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, on the grounds that he had neither washed his father's body, nor been present at his funeral procession (Figure 3[4]),[5] though a later account has his son and successor, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, miraculously translocating into his prison cell to perform the last rites.[6] Such arguments had continued to circulate and were activated after the death of the eleventh Imam.[7]

Despite the political and theological importance of such funerary rituals, Jaʿfar was not able to insinuate himself into performing them after the death of his brother. There are three main versions of who performed the rituals over the eleventh Imam's corpse. The most plausible version is that Abū ʿĪsā b. al-Mutawakkil, the brother of the reigning caliph, al-Muʿtamid, performed Ḥasan's funerary rituals. His involvement is corroborated in several

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[1] See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 26–27; Leor Halevi, *Muḥammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 43–83.

[2] Prophets and Imams are considered by Imami Shia as functionally similar, both being recognized as God's proof (*ḥujja*) on earth.

[3] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:384–85.

[4] This image is later than our period, coming from a manuscript of the *Maqāmāt* of Ḥarīrī, illustrated by a Yaḥyā b. Maḥmūd b. Yaḥyā al-Wāsiṭī, dated 634/1236–37, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 5847, f29v.

[5] Buyukkara, "Schism," 90–91; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:384–85.   [6] Buyukkara, "Schism," 94.

[7] *Wāqifī* ideas and hadith also provided the most important precedent for Occultation ideas after the death of the eleventh Imam. See Ansari, *L'imamat*, esp. 165–80; Buyukkara, "Schism," 82–86. See Klemm, "*Sufarā*," 135–36, for the precedence set by the Wāqifa for the development of *ghayba* literature. Arjomand refers to the Occultation of the twelfth Imam as a "neo-Waqifite" theory, "Imam *Absconditus*," 1–5.

FIGURE 3 A funeral

independent versions in the Shiʿi sources.[8] It is perfectly plausible that a
member of the ʿAbbasid elite should pray over his cousin, and there appear
to be few reasons for such an account to have been fabricated or preserved –
especially by the Occultation faction. By contrast, the alternatives bear the
signs of retrospective ideologically inspired elaboration, precisely because

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[8] Compare this report with the more detailed one in Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, transmitted by al-Ḥusayn
b. Muḥammad al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī attending upon the tax-collector of Qumm, Aḥmad b.
ʿUbayd Allāh b. Khāqān, who in turn transmits the story of the death of Ḥasan from his
father, the vizier. In this report, Abū ʿĪsā b. al-Mutawakkil prays over Ḥasan's corpse, and
shows his face to the assembled ʿAlids and ʿAbbasids to prove his death. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*,
1:503–6. This report is also reproduced almost identically in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, trans-
mitted by Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī. *Kamāl*, 40–44. Following this report Ibn Bābūya
comments that it incontrovertibly establishes the death of Ḥasan, presumably in opposition
to those Imamis who stopped at the Imamate of Ḥasan. *Kamāl*, 44. See also Hussain,
Occultation, 57n4; Sachedina, *Messianism*, 210n36.

the idea of an ʿAbbasid performing these rituals did not conform to the Imami ideal.

Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl* provides a doctrinally corrected version of the story of the funeral of the eleventh Imam in which Jaʿfar is about to pray over the corpse, but the child Imam miraculously appears and prays over his father instead. In this version, the washing had already been accomplished. The child Imam stops Jaʿfar as he is about to pray over the corpse, saying, "Uncle it is more my right to pray over him than yours," at which Jaʿfar is riven with emotion causing his face to become ashen and yellowed.[9] This report fits the child Imam into the traditional pattern of proofs of succession to the Imamate. Apparently, at some point in the decades that succeeded Ḥasan's death, the partisans of the child Imam suffered embarrassment at the reports that it was Ibn al-Mutawakkil who had prayed over him, rather than their hidden Imam, and the historical narratives shifted accordingly to generate new facts about the prayer. Ṭūsī provides a further account in which the canonical first envoy conducted the funerary rites for the eleventh Imam, representing yet another claim to represent the legitimate succession to Imamic authority.[10]

While it is unlikely that the ʿAbbasid as prayer leader was fabricated by the Shiʿi sources, this does not mean that the event was not surrounded with ideological interpretations in the narratives which recount it. One account in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* suggests an ideological interest even for the ʿAbbasids themselves. The ʿAbbasid caliph is depicted as engineering events as a public display of control over the legacy of Ḥasan after his death:

[When informed of the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the Caliph] al-Muʿtamid ordered his brother to ride with the vizier and ʿAbd al-Ṣamad[11] to the house of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] in order to look at him, uncover his face, wash him, enshroud him, pray over him, and bury him with his father, and that they should then look for any offspring and return to [the caliph] with the story, then approach

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[9] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–76.

[10] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225–26; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 92n208. Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*, however, was written substantially later, in 447/1055–56 (see Modarressi, *Crisis*, 84) and the report shows the influence of substantial theologized redaction, including the use of the word *ʿadāla* to refer to the two ʿAmrīs, which strongly suggests a later phase of canonization. Arjomand glossed over the contradictions in accounts about the funerary rituals stating that the brother of the ʿAbbasid caliph prayed over the corpse ("Crisis," 499) but also that the first canonical envoy, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, conducted the funerary rites for the Imam (ibid., 502).

[11] This is perhaps the ʿAbbasid and governor of Mecca, who was the leader of the pilgrimage in 243, 244, and 249 AH. See Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk)*, vol. 34, trans. Joel Kramer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 147–48.

the rest of the elite, the general people, and the lowly in order that they should attend the prayers for him.

And Abū ʿĪsā [b. al-Mutawakkil] and the vizier and ʿAbd al-Ṣamad did everything [the caliph] ordered them to do, and they looked at who was in the house (*dār*) and they returned to al-Muʿtamid and al-Muʿtamid said to his brother, Abū ʿĪsā, "I prophesy the good news (*ubashshir*) that you will succeed to the caliphate, because when Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī] died, I went out and prayed [over al-Hādī] together with [al-Muʿtazz] in [al-Hādī's] house . . . And when we had buried Abū al-Ḥasan and I had returned, [al-Muʿtazz] said, 'I prophesy good news, Aḥmad: you prayed over Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī][12] so you will be rewarded with the caliphate for your prayers over him.' And you, Abū ʿĪsā, have prayed over [Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī],[13] and I hope that you will be rewarded with the caliphate as I was."[14]

The conviction here of the talismanic effects of interaction with the Imam suggest a Shiʿi interpretive milieu, and one in which the ʿAbbasids are incorporated as invested in the drama of the Imamate, indicating how the motivations of different actors could be instrumentally woven into the narratives of Imamic charisma. If the caliph sent his brother to pray over the deceased Imam, it was certainly a mark of respect for his noble relations, but also may indicate a historical intervention into the family politics of one of the most important ʿAlid lineages, at a time when ʿAbbasid legitimacy was being eroded, and succession to the caliphate was frequently decided through palace coup.[15] It is notable that the caliph's act is linked here to the search for any offspring that Ḥasan might have had: an implicit connection is made between the act of praying over the corpse and the status of the Imam's heir. This suggests that this account was formed under the influence of the Twelver conviction that the Occultation was occasioned by aggressive ʿAbbasid surveillance.[16] The interaction of initial events and the varied interests in the retrospective discursive elaboration of these events makes such reports complex artifacts of a moment of crisis and its aftermath.

Though Abū ʿĪsā b. al-Mutawakkil never succeeded to the caliphate, the fact that he prayed over Ḥasan's corpse was not without repercussions for

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[12] This contradicts the traditional Twelver account in which Ḥasan washed and prayed over his father's corpse; see Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:313.

[13] The text reads, in fact, "Abū al-Ḥasan," which must be a mistake, for the anecdote makes no sense unless this refers to Hādī's son, Ḥasan. Thus, instead of "Abū al-Ḥasan," we must read this as either "Abū Muḥammad" or "Ḥasan."

[14] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 290–91.

[15] For the political machinations during the Samarra period, see, for example, Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200–275/815–889 C.E.)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[16] A claim to be found in many of the other reports which we will analyze below.

the Imamis, for it did at least block Jaʿfar "the Liar" from adopting this symbolic ritual role which might have supported his claim as the most viable living candidate for the Imamate. This was the first of several pivotal moments in which Jaʿfar was unable to insert himself into a role of symbolic performance of Imamate.

THE INHERITANCE DISPUTE

Once the funeral rites had been performed, the next confrontation which features in our sources was over the property of the deceased Imam. Like many great families before and since, the Imamic family was riven by a dispute about inheritance. The crisis of succession was not merely a question of religious principles, for the material and the symbolic were intertwined. Like the rites of death, material inheritance provided key indications to the Shiʿi community about Imamic legitimacy. As soon as the eleventh Imam died, rivals for the inheritance attempted to create facts on the ground. As I showed at the very beginning of this book, hostile Shiʿi accounts accused Jaʿfar of using force to seize the property of his dead brother. Despite the polemical tone, it seems plausible that Jaʿfar may well have tried to thereby appropriate the symbolically and materially valuable Imamic property for himself. Jaʿfar had clearly not been the only one to leap into action upon Ḥasan's death. We are told that, "the mother of Abū Muḥammad, whose name was Ḥudayth, came from Medina when the news reached her from Samarra."[17] There is nothing unusual for a mother to come to visit her son's grave, but given the dispute that followed, we can see that among Ḥudayth's motives for coming to Samarra was the need to carry out proceedings to secure her part of the dead Imam's property against the claims of Jaʿfar.

Twelver sources tend to damn Jaʿfar by suggesting that he collaborated with the hated ʿAbbasids to secure his portion of the inheritance. Ibn Bābūya euphemistically states that,

Ḥudayth had stories too long to explain with [the Imam's] brother Jaʿfar, and his demanding his inheritance from her, and his slandering her behind her back to the sultan, and his revealing of things that God (AJ) commanded to be concealed.[18]

Given that our sources are overwhelmingly hostile toward Jaʿfar, we can assume that Jaʿfar's "slandering" Ḥudayth to the caliph may simply refer to his attempt to seek arbitration in the case of the inheritance, an

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[17] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473–74.   [18] Ibid.

accusation which probably made more sense as retrospective polemic than a problem at the time.[19] Several other reports depict Jaʿfar seeking the arbitration of the caliph, or vizier.[20] However, it clearly went both ways. The slur that Jaʿfar was a collaborator with the illegitimate institutions of the caliphate is not really fair. Ḥudayth, after all, benefited from a bequest made by Ḥasan which was administered by caliphal law, including the officially recognized witnesses of the *qāḍī* courts.[21] However ideologically opposed to the ʿAbbasids the Imamis were, their administration represented the law of the land, and resorting to it must have been the norm amongst the Imams and their followers alike, rather than the exception.[22]

Given their interest in the Imam's funerary rituals, we can assume that the ʿAbbasid authorities also had their own reasons for taking an interest in the fate of the property of the Imam. The *qāḍī* appears in various accounts as having been actively involved, including in the above report, which continues as follows:

And at that time, Ṣaqīl [the concubine] claimed that she was pregnant, and she was carried to the house of al-Muʿtamid. The women of al-Muʿtamid and his servants, the women of Muwaffaq and his servants, and the women of the Qāḍī Ibn Abī al-Shawārib, monitored her condition continuously. They watched [her] until they were suddenly taken unawares by the matter of al-Ṣaffār and the death of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān and their exit from Samarra and the matter of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Basra, and other things distracted their attention from her.[23]

It would most likely have taken a few weeks for Ḥudayth to hear the news and then travel to Samarra. Meanwhile, the authorities maintained the Imam's property sealed and undivided: *Dustūr al-munajjimīn* states that,

They referred [the case] to the *qāḍī*s of the oppressors, and Ṣaqīl was directed to the hands of one of the ʿAlids for four years and the *mīrāth* was embargoed (*ḥubisa*) from Jaʿfar.[24]

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[19] Modarressi accepts at face value the idea that Jaʿfar's reputation among the Imamis was sullied by his appeal to the hated Sunni authorities. *Crisis*, 78–79.

[20] In some reports Jaʿfar wants the caliph to rule in his favor over the matter of who should be Imam and receive tithes from the Imami community. It is likely that this appeal was understood in tandem with his claim to the inheritance. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476–79.

[21] See Mufīd, *Fuṣūl*, 69–70.

[22] The question of whether there was also an Imami legal system that paralleled the law of the land is an intriguing one, which has not, to my knowledge, been addressed by scholars.

[23] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474.

[24] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann. It is evocative that the form *ḥ-b-s* is also used for *waqf* endowments.

The *qāḍī*'s action to take the pregnancy seriously and inspect the concubines appears to have favored Ḥudayth rather than Jaʿfar, by delaying the division of inheritance until her arrival in Samarra, and then further until the case of the concubine was cleared up. During deliberations, Jaʿfar was not able to take possession of the house or property, which remained impounded and sealed. We cannot be certain about the affiliation of various players at court, but this does seem to suggest that Ḥudayth, at least as much as Jaʿfar, relied on useful contacts with the ʿAbbasid authorities, for all the accusations leveled at Jaʿfar by Twelver tradition.

WAṢIYYA VERSUS *MĪRĀTH*

Our sources make a clear link between the inheritance dispute and the claim that Ṣaqīl the concubine was pregnant with the Imam's child. The mention of the phantom pregnancy is widespread among the sources, and there are good reasons to suppose that this claim represents a historical event.[25] The division of the inheritance is explicitly related to the judgment about the phantom pregnancy.[26] As the heresiographies inform us, even among those who believed in some form of Occultation, there were multiple different versions of how and when the Imam was believed to have been born. These different positions are reflected in the narrative reports about the inheritance dispute, which display a bewildering mosaic of nuances and contradictions.[27] Nonetheless, a few key facts emerge from the polemical white noise generated in the first decades after Ḥasan's death. The reports agree that there was a dispute over inheritance (*mīrāth*) between Ḥasan's mother and brother. There is also a mention of a bequest (*waṣiyya*) made out to the mother, which we will return to. The

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[25] See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85, for the heresiographical treatment of this claim, and below for a more detailed discussion.

[26] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–6.

[27] The accounts that relate to the dispute over the inheritance are as follows, the *Riwāyat majlis Ibn Khāqān*, quoted both in Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–6, and Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473–74; also compiled and discussed in Ansari, *L'imamat*, 230–34. See also Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:329–30, 524–25; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88, 442, 501, 507; Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 81–82; Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummi, *Maqālāt*, 101–2; Mufīd, *Fuṣūl*, 61–63; Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 223–24; Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣl fī al-milal wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Māḍī al-Rakhāwī (Cairo: Maktabat al-salām al-ʿālamiyya, 1348/1929), 4:77, 138; and the translation of Israel Friedlaender, *The Heterodoxies of the Shiites according to Ibn Hazm* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1909), 47, 76; *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann. Modarressi mentions the role of Ḥudayth and the will, but does not indicate the relevance of the difference between the bequest and the inheritance, *Crisis*, 78–79.

division of the inheritance, which was reportedly very large,[28] was delayed by the claim that one of Ḥasan's concubines was pregnant with a son: a contention that would legally have resulted in significantly altering the division of property in favor of Ḥasan's mother.[29] The caliphal authorities were brought in to resolve the dispute, and on examination and after a period of waiting, the concubine's pregnancy was disproved, and the inheritance was divided between Ḥasan's brother and mother. This claim delayed the division of the inheritance for a number of years: some say two,[30] others four,[31] and still others seven,[32] though the figure of two years is the earliest mentioned and most likely.[33] The sources emphasize the painful nature of this dispute, and the factions that arose as a result. Among those who asserted the Imamate of Ḥasan, a key rupture emerged between those who claimed that the posthumous pregnancy resulted in a child who was the Imam,[34] and those who came to believe that Ḥasan had had a son before his death (ultimately the canonical Twelver position).

Hitherto, the distinction between Ḥasan's inheritance and his bequest has not been clearly emphasized.[35] However, these have distinctive legal and institutional implications, and indeed different associations for Shiʿi Imamology and cosmology. The best way to achieve clarity on the distinct role played by each is to refer to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd's concise theological tract written more than a century after the events, *al-Fuṣūl al-ʿashara fī al-ghayba*.[36] The fact that Mufīd deals with the eleventh Imam's *mīrāth* and his *waṣiyya* in two separate chapters[37] clearly demonstrates that they were regarded separately, and each one had a distinct significance. Chapter 2 of the *Fuṣūl* addresses Jaʿfar's denial of Imami claims about the existence of the child Imam. Jaʿfar relates this to his claim to the property left behind by

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[28] Mufīd mentions the inheritance's "magnificence (*jalāla*) and its quantity and the greatness of its value," *Fuṣūl*, 63.

[29] Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78.

[30] See Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Tanbīh* in Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88. Ibn Bābūya's version (but not Kulaynī's) of the *Riwāyat majlis Ibn Khāqān* has the surveillance of the concubines going on for "two years or more." For a comparison of the two versions, see Ansari, *L'imamat*, 230–34.

[31] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann.

[32] Ibn Ḥazm, *Milal*, 4:77; Friedlander, *Heterodoxies*, 76.

[33] Arguments presented below. Arjomand and Modarressi both give the number as seven years without comparing divergent reports. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 79; Arjomand, "Crisis," 513n96.

[34] Many, however, switched to support the Imamate of Jaʿfar at just this time.

[35] Modarressi makes sparing allusion to both, but does not clearly distinguish. *Crisis*, 77–79.

[36] Mufīd, *Fuṣūl*.

[37] That he should devote two of his ten chapters to these topics indicates the importance with which they were still viewed, more than a century after the events.

his brother: if there is no child, then the property must have been his legitimate inheritance. Jaʿfar is said to have sought to disprove the child's existence by instigating the authorities to arrest the Imam's concubines and to subject them to a meticulous examination to disprove any signs of pregnancy.

In chapter 3 of the *Fuṣūl*, we learn that the opponents of the Twelvers had advanced arguments against the existence of the child Imam based on Ḥasan's (perhaps written) bequest (*waṣiyya*) to his mother. The bequest is described as having been made during the final sickness from which the Imam died. Mufīd seeks to refute the idea that the existence of a bequest in favor of the mother means that there was no son.[38] He notes that this *waṣiyya* bequest related to Ḥasan's status as a beneficiary of pious endowments (*bi-wuqūfihi wa-ṣadaqātihi*). It is interesting to speculate whether these endowments were part of a standard mechanism for the passing down of property belonging to the institutionalized Imamate, as hinted in the report quoted in Chapter 1 about Hādī's inheritance of Jawād's property "because of Imamate." If so, then they may have formed a connection between the mother as an inheritor of material property, and the report about the mother as a guardian of the Imamate which we will explore below.

In basic terms, *mīrāth* refers to inheritance which is divided up (once debts and funerary expenses have been paid) among close family members according to set shares stipulated in the Qurʾān.[39] *Waṣiyya*, on the other hand, refers to a voluntary bequest that is reserved before the Qurʾānically obligated shares are paid out. In classical Islamic law, up to a third of one's property can be entrusted to a particular person after death, or during the final sickness. There are differences in Shiʿi and Sunni law which may have significant implications for this case. In classical Sunni law, the Qurʾānically stipulated heirs of the inheritance are restricted from receiving bequests without the consent of the other heirs. On the other hand, "the Imāmī Shīʿīs permit legacies to qualified heirs without restriction,"[40] thereby presumably allowing Ḥudayth to inherit a *waṣiyya* bequest as well

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[38] This claim is interesting in itself in what it might suggest about the bequest of property in Imamic families. Perhaps it was practice to pass down Imamic revenues in a bequest as a means of indicating the heir to the Imamate. This seems to be supported by a hadith regarding Imamic property on the death of Jawād; see Chapter 1.

[39] Though in practice the division of shares is significantly more complicated than laid out in the Qurʾān, and the intricacies were elaborated in subsequent legal discourse. J. Schacht and A. Layish, "*Mīrāth*," *EI2*; R. Peters, "*Waṣiyya*," *EI2*; Agostino Cilardo, "Bequest," *EI3*; Etan Kohlberg, "*Waṣī*," *EI2*.

[40] Cilardo, "Bequest," *EI3*.

as a share of the *mīrāth* inheritance. Given that there was little love lost between Jaʿfar and his brother's mother,[41] he would have had every reason to doubt Ḥudayth's claim to the bequest, perhaps accusing her of forgery, an accusation which might fit with the accounts of Jaʿfar "slandering her behind her back to the sultan."[42] However, the *Riwāyat majlis Ibn Khāqān*,[43] at least, suggests that Ḥudayth's claim to be *waṣī* (legatee) was accepted by the courts:

When the pregnancy was proved false by those women, the inheritance (*mīrāth*) was divided between [Ḥasan's] mother and his brother, Jaʿfar, and his mother claimed his bequest (*waṣiyyatahu*) and established that with the *qāḍī*.[44]

This suggests that Ḥudayth was indeed successful in establishing her right to the bequest with the authorities. If this bequest included control of the endowments of the Imamate, as Mufīd's *Fuṣūl* indicates, then it may have represented the control of great resources that she could disburse, even if not divided up as personal wealth, and, furthermore, might imply collaboration with the agents used to administering these endowed estates.

THE PREGNANT CONCUBINE NARRATIVE: THE ORIGINAL VERSION
OF THE OCCULTED CHILD IMAM?

The story of Ḥasan's concubine and her phantom pregnancy is widely circulated in different versions. The fact that it is usually associated closely with the inheritance dispute implies that it was generated soon after the Occultation when the dispute was still a live issue. The fact that this noncanonical account of the birth of the hidden Imam survives in Twelver sources implies that it was so widespread and well-embedded in key Occultation reports that it became too difficult to erase even after the

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[41] I assume that Jaʿfar and Ḥasan had different mothers.   [42] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473–74.

[43] A report that was purportedly given by Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān when he was the fiscal agent for Qumm. He is characterized by his Shiʿi transmitters as an anti-Shiʿi (*nāṣib*) ʿAbbasid bureaucrat who passed the report to traditionists at a session in audience in Qumm on the authority of his father, ʿUbayd Allāh, an energetic political actor of the Samarra period and vizier to the caliph al-Muʿtamid at the time of the death of Ḥasan. His second tenure as vizier, under the caliph al-Muʿtamid, was from 256/869–70 until he died in 263/877. Matthew Gordon, "The Khāqānid Families of the Early ʿAbbasid Period," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 2 (2001): 244–47; Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1986), 176. For details on the *majālis*, see Ansari, *L'imamat*, 226–28, and 230–34 of the Arabic appendix.

[44] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:505.

canonization of the idea of the birth during Ḥasan's lifetime. This gives us the impression that it may have been the very first widely disseminated version of the claim that Ḥasan had had a child and heir, which was followed by other accounts that developed once the pregnancy had been disproved.

Multiple different names are attributed to the mother of the hidden Imam. Ultimately, in canonizing statements, these come to be listed together as if they were a single narrative personality. Thus, for example, Ibn Bābūya quotes a canonizing statement (which is also one of the earliest reports to mention all the envoys in a sequence): "The offspring, the Mahdī (AS), was born on a Friday, and his mother was Rayḥāna, and she was known as Narjis, and she was known as Ṣaqīl, and she was known as Sawsan . . ."[45] While Ibn Bābūya here lists the different names as if they all belonged to one person, at an earlier period the different names clearly originated with different kinds of competing claims about the Imam and his mother.[46] Thus, while the name Ṣaqīl is often associated with reports about a posthumous pregnancy,[47] the name Narjis is associated almost exclusively with a birth during Ḥasan's lifetime.[48]

Our reports also differ over who was behind the pregnancy claim. Several different actors are depicted as being responsible in different

[45] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 432.

[46] Perhaps most extravagant is the claim that she was the granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 417–23. Hussain observes that this account was probably circulated with the intention of ascribing high social status to the mother of the Imam. *Occultation*, 68. Nawbakhtī notes that among the competing claims about the hidden Imam's mother was a noble woman (*sariyya*) who was posthumously pregnant. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85–86.

[47] See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474, and Ibn Ḥazm, who notes that "this Ṣaqīl claimed pregnancy after al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, her master, and his inheritance [division] was interrupted due to that, for seven years." *Milal*, 4:77; Friedlander, *Heterodoxies*, 76. An outlying report in which Ṣaqīl is associated with the birth of the child Imam during the lifetime of his father appears (also with ʿAqīd the eunuch) in Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474–75.

[48] "And a group [of the Imami Shiʿa] said that indeed [the child Imam was born] during the lifetime of his father, and they transmit that from Ḥakīma bt. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā [the daughter of Jawād] and that she witnessed the [child Imam's] birth and heard him speak when he fell from his mother's belly reciting the Qurʾān and that his mother was Narjis and that she was the noble one [Friedlander follows a different version: 'and that she herself (Hukeima) was his nurse.']. But most of them said, rather his mother was Ṣaqīl and a group of them said, rather his mother was Sawsan, but all of this is folly, for the aforementioned al-Ḥasan had no offspring, neither male nor female." Ibn Ḥazm, *Milal*, 4:138–39; Friedlander, *Heterodoxies*, 48. Among the reports that associate the name Narjis with birth during Ḥasan's lifetime are Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, 281; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 246–47, 249, 293.

reports: the caliphal authorities,[49] the concubine herself,[50] Ḥasan's mother,[51] and even Jaʿfar "the Liar."[52] This wide variety of actors implies that while the existence of a posthumous pregnancy claim was unchallenged, multiple motivations were at play in the way this narrative fact was interpreted and elaborated in new versions. In general, the Twelver accounts can be seen to start distancing themselves from the idea of a posthumous pregnancy, as it ultimately conflicts with the canonized narrative which places the birth of the hidden Imam during his father's lifetime. Associating the claim with Jaʿfar "the Liar" is one way this is achieved. In one account he brings two concubines to the caliphal authorities and they are watched for two years for signs of pregnancy, but the narrator avers that these claims were not proven about the women in question, nor about anyone else. In another report, not only is Jaʿfar given the blame for involving the authorities in the search for the child Imam, but Ṣaqīl's claim of pregnancy is depicted as being an intentional smokescreen to put the authorities off the scent of the real child Imam. This story, then, achieves the goal of affirming the birth of the child Imam before his father's death, while incorporating the inconveniently persistent story of the posthumous pregnancy.[53]

The passage from *Riwāyat majlis Ibn Khāqān* quoted above depicts the claim that a concubine of Ḥasan was pregnant arose from inspection at the behest of the caliphal authorities: the women of the Caliph al-Muʿtamid, the women of Muwaffaq, and the women of the Qāḍī Ibn Abī al-Shawārib made examinations, and it is these wise women who determine that one of Ḥasan's concubines was pregnant.

In almost all versions, the posthumous pregnancy is directly linked with the delay to the division of the inheritance. The *Dustūr al-munajjimīn* suggests that Ḥasan's mother promoted the story of the posthumous pregnancy, in a calculated fashion, to prevent the inheritance going to Jaʿfar:

The correct, proven version according to what has been transmitted by those who were present for the events . . .[54] is that al-Ḥasan's mother claimed [that] al-Ḥasan

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[49] Thus, in the *Riwāyat majlis Ibn Khāqān*, the "discovery" of the pregnancy was made by one of the women appointed by the caliphal authorities to inspect the concubines. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 503–6.

[50] Ibid., 473–74.

[51] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann.

[52] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya* (Beirut ed.), 295.

[53] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–76. It is notable, too, that this is also the report which depicts the child Imam as having washed the corpse of his father, thereby betraying a high level of doctrinally aligned correction.

[54] The wording here has been garbled.

had an unborn child due from a concubine belonging to him called Ṣaqīl so she prevented the inheritance (*mīrāth*) [from going] to Jaʿfar.[55]

Modarressi suggests that Ḥasan's mother resorted to the posthumous pregnancy to counter Jaʿfar's attempt to cut her out of the *mīrāth* inheritance altogether:

According to the Sunnite law of inheritance followed by the Caliphate, if Ḥasan had died without a son, his inheritance would be divided between his mother and Jaʿfar. Shiʿite law, however, would give it all to her, because it did not allow siblings to inherit while a parent still lived. To prevent Jaʿfar from getting any part of her son's inheritance, she told the government officials that one of Ḥasan's slave girls was pregnant by him.[56]

Modarressi's argument appears plausible, though a note of caution should be added, as we know very little about the state of Shiʿi law at this time, or how the Shiʿa interacted with the caliphal legal system (as they must have had to do regularly, as a matter of course). Likewise, the *Dustūr*'s report shares much with the propagandist claims we see elsewhere that iniquitous characters were manipulating the Imamate for financial gain, and so it may have been generated with the malicious intention of slurring Ḥudayth.

During and after the period of ʿAbbasid surveillance, the concubine is said to have come under the protection of prominent ʿAlid-Shiʿi notables. The *Dustūr al-munajjimīn* says that one of the ʿAlids supported her for four years while the inheritance dispute was being overseen by the "*qāḍī* of the oppressors."[57] The involvement of this anonymous ʿAlid again depicts the *qāḍī* (Ibn Abī al-Shawārib again?) as involved in politicking with elite ʿAlid actors in Samarra. These ʿAlids, in their turn, would have had an interest in how the inheritance case was resolved, and may have been willing to collaborate with the authorities in the process. In one report, as we have seen, the concubine is said to have escaped as the authorities were distracted by the political events that engulfed the caliphate at that time, including the death of the vizier Ibn Khāqān and the revolt of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Basra.[58] Ibn Ḥazm reports that even after the settling of the inheritance dispute, the case of the concubine was watched by the authorities:

The infighting (*fitna*) of the Rejectionists (*rawāfiḍ*) [i.e. the Imami Shiʿa] with regards to this Ṣaqīl increased along with their claims, until al-Muʿtaḍid

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[55] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann.
[56] Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78.
[57] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann.
[58] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476.

FIGURE 4 Modern location of house of ʿAskarī Imams in Samarra

imprisoned her twenty-odd years after the death of her master. She was upbraided for being in the residence of al-Ḥasan b. Jaʿfar al-Nawbakhtī al-Kātib, and she was discovered in it and carried to the stronghold (*qaṣr*) of al-Muʿtaḍid. She stayed there until she died in the stronghold in the days of al-Muqtadir [295–320/908–932].[59]

The fact that it is a Nawbakhtī who is seen to harbor her is evocative, suggesting direct political involvement of the Nawbakhtīs at a time when the third canonical envoy, Ibn Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī, was rising toward leadership of the community. If we accept from this admittedly late and polemical anti-Shiʿi account the suggestion that the concubine Ṣaqīl was still deemed significant twenty years after the death of the eleventh Imam, it would suggest that the rumors were long-lived indeed, and survived up to the period when the concept of the envoy was beginning to be propagated more actively.

An interesting coda to this story is the fact that within the house of the tenth and eleventh Imams in Samarra (Figure 4),[60] which is now a shrine,

[59] Ibn Ḥazm, *Milal*, 4:77.
[60] This photo bears the date 1918. The central building contains the graves of the Imams, and the smaller dome to the left of the picture is dedicated to the hidden Imam. None of the physical structures visible date to the period covered by this book, and the layout of the shrine probably dates to its first development in the fourth/tenth century under the Buyids.

there is a tomb for the mother of the hidden Imam, now commonly named Narjis, along with the other protagonists of this early phase: Ḥudayth, the mother of the eleventh Imam, Ḥakīma, his aunt, and, interestingly, also Jaʿfar "the Liar," which, given his later unpopularity, seems to suggest that these tombs were not added at a later date, but rather commemorate the historical events of the third/ninth century.[61] As we shall see below, early reports tell us that Jaʿfar did inherit the house and initially tried to prevent Ḥudayth from being buried there. This begs the question of the identity of the woman commemorated here as Narjis: whether it was indeed a concubine who claimed a posthumous pregnancy, or someone else from among the women of the eleventh Imam.

While competition over the meaning of the story obscures the original details of events, one thing seems clear: early claims of a posthumous pregnancy stirred up such great interest as to leave an indelible record behind. To all appearances, then, the case of the concubine's posthumous pregnancy, closely intertwined as it was with the division of the Imam's inheritance which it is said to have delayed, was perhaps the first publicization of the idea that Ḥasan had a son and heir. Given the great interest in the story, we can surmise that the posthumous pregnancy was the focus of early hopes for those Imamis who needed there to be an Imam, but could not accept Jaʿfar. When the phantom pregnancy was disproved through ʿAbbasid intervention, the belief in a child of Ḥasan did not disappear, and stories of the child's birth before Ḥasan's death gained increasing currency. The ultimately canonized idea that a child was born to Ḥasan during his lifetime by "Narjis" must have taken several decades to gain consensus. This is a sign that, at this early stage, there was no clear top-down structure

However, Northedge suggests that the two domes of the shrine complex pictured here "were certainly located in the same house," giving us a sense of a house "of substantial size," but "not among the largest houses in Samarra," and dwarfed by the palaces of the caliph and other key ʿAbbasid figures. Alistair Northedge, "The Shrine in Its Historical Context," in *The Shiʿa of Samarra: The Heritage and Politics of a Community in Iraq*, ed. Imranali Panjwani (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 56. The central area of the Samarra shrine under the larger dome contains four tombs, belonging to the two Imams and Ḥudayth and Ḥakīma. In addition, Narjis is said to have been buried on the site, as well as the brothers of ʿAlī al-Hādī, Yaḥyā and Ḥusayn (see ibid., 58), and also Jaʿfar "the Liar" himself. The photo comes from Ernst Herzfeld Papers, FSA.A.06, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Gift of Ernst Herzfeld, 1946, Ernst Herzfeld, FSA A.06 04. PF.23.135.

[61] See Dhabīḥ Allāh Maḥallātī, *Maʾāthir al-kubarāʾ fī tārīkh sāmarrāʾ*, 3 vols. (Najaf: Intishārāt al-maktaba al-ḥaydariyya, 1426/2005–6), 1:291, 300–301, 310–11, https://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&b_id=2364. Maḥallātī interprets a rescript of the hidden Imam as showing that God has pardoned Jaʿfar's sins (311).

of leadership in the community to dictate official doctrine, but only the point and counterpoint of competing claims.

Dating the inheritance dispute is difficult, given the divergent reports, but it is important to try, as it will help us to understand the timeline for the assertion of leadership in the Imami community. Diverging reports suggest that the dispute may have lasted anywhere between eight months and seven years.[62] The *Dustūr al-munajjimīn* is alone in giving four years as the period during which the property was embargoed from Jaʿfar.[63] Modarressi relies on the later evidence of Ibn Ḥazm to assert that the inheritance of Ḥasan had been divided between Ḥudayth and Jaʿfar "after seven years of struggle,"[64] but he gives no reason for preferring this date, and his judgment therefore appears rather arbitrary. Instead, we would be justified in following the numerous earlier reports provided by Ibn Bābūya and others which indicate two years as the period for the inheritance dispute and the resolution of the phantom pregnancy.[65] Even two years

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[62] Nawbakhtī mentions that not one, but two of the splinter groups after Ḥasan claimed that a woman was pregnant with a child Imam who was son to Ḥasan. One group claimed that the truth of the concubine's pregnancy had been proven by the examinations of ʿAbbasid authorities, and that she gave birth eight months after his death (though this fact had been hidden, presumably miraculously, from the authorities who formerly had affirmed her pregnancy). Another believed that it was a noble woman (*sariyya*) who was pregnant, and that the pregnancy would be prolonged until some unspecified time in the future. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85–86. This latter account appears to have been generated through the idealizing reconceptualization of the circumstances surrounding the phantom pregnancy, in which the lowly concubine was exchanged for a noble woman, and the problematic falsification of the pregnancy by the authorities being replaced by a *ghayba*-style solution in which the pregnant woman was anonymous and her pregnancy was miraculously hyperextended.

[63] *Dustūr al-munajjimīn*, personal communication from Eva Orthmann.

[64] See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 79.

[65] Ibn Bābūya's version of the report from Aḥmad Ibn Khāqān notes the time it took for the phantom pregnancy to be disproved as "two years or more," which is around 262/876. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 40–44. In the almost identical version of the report which appears in the earlier Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, this dating is omitted. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–6. In another account, Ḥakīma, the daughter of Imam Jawād and sister of Hādī, is asked about the leadership of the Shiʿi community in the year 262, and she remarks that hadith exist predicting that the twelfth Imam's "inheritance (*mīrāth*) will be divided while living." Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501. In the *Kitāb al-tanbīh* by Abū Sahl Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī al-Nawbakhtī, of which Ibn Bābūya transmits a part, we learn that "[the twelfth Imam] disappeared (AS) because the sultan searched for him openly, and appointed [watchers] to his houses, and withheld him

seems unusually long, as the usual waiting period for a woman whose consort had died was around three to four months,[66] but as we have seen, the resolution of the matter was probably a matter of political maneuvering, rather than adhering to the letter of Islamic law.

We have some clues that, even after the division of the inheritance, tensions between Ḥudayth and Jaʿfar persisted. In one report, Ḥudayth requests to be buried in the Imam's house after her death. Jaʿfar's churlish reluctance to allow Ḥudayth to be buried in the house results in the miraculous intervention of the child Twelfth Imam:

And when the grandmother, al-Ḥasan's mother, died she ordered that she should be buried in the house, but [Jaʿfar] opposed them and said, "It is my house. She shall not be buried in it!"

But [the child Imam] (AS) came out and said, "O Jaʿfar! Is it your house?" Then he disappeared, and he did not see him after that.[67]

This leads one to understand that Ḥudayth was ultimately buried in the house, despite Jaʿfar's opposition. If so, this would associate her with the spiritual charisma of the ʿAskarī Imams, both of whom had been buried in their house in Samarra. As noted above, it appears that both Ḥudayth and thereafter Jaʿfar were buried in the Samarra house.

While Jaʿfar and Ḥudayth carried on their dispute in and out of the courts, this made the continuation of the normal functions of the Imamate difficult. As we shall see, there are reports suggesting that the agent named

(*ḥaramahu*) for two years." Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 90. In another pair of reports cited by Ibn Bābūya, the date of the ending of the surveillance of the pregnant concubine is established with reference to various political events, which again suggest that this event occurred around 262/876. In one we are told that the concubine was watched "until the matter of al-Ṣaffār, and the death of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān, suddenly crushed them; and their attention was distracted from her by their exit from Samarra and the matter of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Basra." Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473–74. Yaʿqūb b. Layth al-Ṣaffār was defeated by al-Muwaffaq in 262/876. See Edmund Bosworth, "Saffarids," *EIr*. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān died in 262/876. See Gordon, "Khāqānid Families," 246. Samarra was formally abandoned as capital in 279/892, but the caliph al-Muʿtamid is not known to have visited it after 269/884, other than to be buried. See Alistair Northedge, "Samarra," *EI2*. The Zanj revolt was conducted from 255/869 to 270/883. The suppression of the Zanj became a prime concern of the caliphate from 266/883. See A. Popovic, "Zanj," *EI2*. The death of Ibn Khāqān and the rising of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Basra are also used as indicators in another report mentioned by Ibn Bābūya, in which the concubine is said to have escaped. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476.

[66] See Ṭūsī's *Nihāya*, the subchapter of the section on divorce which deals with the complexities of the waiting period of a woman in different circumstances. *Al-Nihāya fī mujarrad al-fiqh wa-l-fatāwā*, ed. Āqā Bozorg-e Tehrānī (Tehran: Maktabat ahl al-bayt, 1382/1962), 531–39.

[67] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442.

Ḥājiz b. Washshāʾ attempted to collect money, even in this chaotic moment, and that the Qummī community sent a delegation to carry their Imamic dues to whichever candidate for Imamate seemed most plausible. If Ḥudayth was successful in making her case that her *waṣiyya* bequest empowered her to control the revenues and endowments of the Imamate, and that Jaʿfar was greedy of this control, then we might conclude that she must have been receiving the funds from the community in this first phase. But there are no reports which indicate this explicitly. Instead, there is more evidence to suggest that at least some people attempted to bring monies to Jaʿfar, though they ultimately became dissatisfied with him. In either case, it is unlikely that any claims to independent authority could successfully have been made by the agents of the Imam. For the agents, they had the option of either supporting or contesting the claims of these two heavy-weight political actors from the Imamic lineage, or withholding judgment and funds until the dispute was resolved. Until the resolution came, speculation and splits were inevitable. Meanwhile, the claims of both the mother and the concubine to be involved in the mediation of the Imamic legacy persisted, for a while.

<center>THE MOTHER: EARLY UNCANONIZED NARRATIVES OF AUTHORITY</center>

In the Twelver sources we find several accounts about a model of Occultation-era leadership that was never canonized. This model includes figures whose mediation and guardianship of the hidden Imam seem to contradict the canonical account of the authority of the agents. The mother is one of these figures, but we also see depicted a concubine-eunuch alliance that seems to be associated with the original claim for a posthumous pregnancy.

As we have seen, our sources use a piece of key terminology – the concept of the bequest or legacy (*waṣiyya*). This term has more than one meaning. In particular, among the Shiʿa, it evokes a more expansive and profound significance than a mere question of property. A *waṣī* can be a pseudo-Imamic figure or an Imam-in-waiting,[68] or it can refer to an executor or the guardian of an Imam who is still a minor. In addition, even the idea of *waṣiyya* as a bequest of property should be seen within the

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[68] For a discussion of the concept of *waṣiyya* and the genre of books on the topic, see Hassan Ansari, "The *Kitāb al-Waṣiyya* of ʿĪsā b. al-Mustafād: The History of a Text," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought*, ed. Michael Cook, Najam Haider, Intisar Rabb, and Asma Sayeed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 67–79.

framework of the sacred economy of the Imamate: the transmission of Imamate is often linked to the transmission of physical objects including weapons and books of sacred knowledge.[69] The fact that the *waṣiyya* to Ḥudayth was said to have included the *wuqūf* and the *ṣadaqāt* is a potent suggestion that here we are seeing an instance of the institutional transmission of the wealth of the Imamate through a *waṣiyya* bequest that acted both as a means of guaranteeing the family fortune for posterity, but also as an indicator of the identity of the guardian of the spiritual legacy of the Imamate. The idea of Ḥudayth as guardian of the Imamate is made clearly in a couple of reports. In one, which exists in several versions, Ḥudayth's role is emphasized by her sister-in-law, the sister of Hādī, Ḥakīma.[70] It begins with the ubiquitous topos of someone who is perplexed, and seeking knowledge about the identity of the Imam after Ḥasan:

Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm said: I went in to Ḥakīma, daughter of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the sister of Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī [i.e. al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam], in the year 262, in Medina, and I spoke to her from behind the curtain (*ḥijāb*) and I asked her about her faith (*dīn*), and she named for me the one through whom it would be completed:[71] she said "so-and-so (*fulān*) son of al-Ḥasan [i.e. the twelfth Imam]" and she named him.

I said to her, "[Did you receive this information] as an eyewitness, (*muʿāyinan*) or as a written report (*khabaran*)?"

She said, "As a written report from Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] who wrote about him [the twelfth Imam] to his mother."

I said to her, "So where is the child?"

She said, "Hidden (*mastūr*)."

I said, "With whom do the Shiʿa seek succor (*ilā man tafzaʿu al-shīʿa*)?"

She said, "The grandmother," Abū Muḥammad's mother.[72]

Ḥasan's aunt Ḥakīma does not claim to be an eyewitness to the child Imam in this report, probably making it an early report compared to others in

which her role is inflated.[73] But she does state that Ḥasan's mother had a more active role than she did as the visible representative of Imamic guidance for the Shiʿa under these new circumstances. The report goes on to address the problematic issue of the Imam being represented by a woman:

I said to her, "Am I to imitate one whose legacy is taken up by a woman (*man waṣiyyatuhu ilā al-marʾa*)?"

She said, "In imitation of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (AS): al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (AS) made out his legacy to his sister Zaynab bt. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib[74] (AS) to outward appearances (*fī al-ẓāhir*). The knowledge (*ʿilm*) that issued from ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn was attributed to Zaynab bt. ʿAlī in order to hide (*tasatturan*) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn." Then she said, "You are a people of hadith transmitters. Have you not transmitted that the inheritance (*mīrāth*) of the ninth descendant of al-Ḥusayn will be divided while he is alive?"[75]

Ḥudayth's authority here is predicated entirely upon her role as a legatee (*waṣī*) who bridges the gap between two Imams, particularly in the case of the minority of the Imam.[76] Clearly, then, there was a period in which Ḥudayth's claim to be the *waṣī* had undergone theological and hadith-based justifications. An important element of this report is the fact that it explicitly responds

[73] In some reports Ḥakīma is depicted as having witnessed the birth of the hidden Imam (Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:330–31; Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 145–47; Ibn Ḥazm, *Milal*, 4:138) and being involved in procuring the concubine who became the mother of the Imam for Ḥasan (Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264) thus associating her firmly with the camp that believed that Ḥasan had had a child during his lifetime, rather than posthumously. She is even depicted as being the guardian of the hidden Imam in some accounts (ibid., 249) though this is contradicted by the account quoted here, in which she only hears of the birth from the Imam when he wrote to his mother, and in other reports where she is as perplexed as to his whereabouts as anyone (ibid., 264–67). These, more modest claims, are perhaps the originals, with later inflations being added on.

[74] Ḥusayn famously died at the battle of Karbala while his son ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn was spared due to his minority, but therefore required a guardian until he reached his majority. In addition to Zaynab, mentioned here, the guardian is sometimes represented as being Umm Salama, and sometimes as Fāṭima. See Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*, trans. I. K. A. Howard (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾan Inc., 1981), 381, 559n4.

[75] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501.

[76] Ḥakīma/Khadīja compares this to the transmission of the Imamate between the third Imam, al-Ḥusayn, and his son ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the fourth Imam, via a female intermediary legatee, or *waṣī*, Zaynab bt. ʿAlī, the aunt of the fourth Imam. A more immediate historical example in which a *waṣiyya* legacy was claimed as being the mechanism for the transference from one Imam to another is that exemplified by one of the groups who claimed the Imamate of Jaʿfar "the Liar" – the so-called Nafīsiyya, who claimed that Jaʿfar's eldest brother had passed on the Imamate, and the Imam's possessions, via the servant-boy legatee Nafīs. See above, and Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 88–89.

to the potential challenges of the hadith transmitters,[77] indicating that Ḥudayth's claim was supported by some among the scholarly elite.

One of the most remarkable reports regarding the role of Ḥasan's mother appears in a tradition in which she is depicted as part of a Nuṣayrī genealogy of intermediaries for the Imams:

Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Ḥasanī [said]: … [The twelfth Imam's] letters, signs, and rescripts (tawqīʿāt) were issued at the hands of Abū Shuʿayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr b. Bakr al-Namīrī, and when he died, they were issued at the hands of his [the hidden Imam's] grandmother, Umm Abī Muḥammad, and his [Ibn Nuṣayr's] son Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān.[78]

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr is regarded by Nuṣayrīs to have been the bāb of the tenth and eleventh Imams. Here he is depicted in the role of envoy, mediating the words of the Imam. He is said to have been succeeded by Ḥasan's mother, followed by the second canonical envoy, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Saʿīd b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī.[79] It is unclear exactly what kind of role the mother is being cast in here – whether purely bureaucratic and mediatory – or if she was understood to participate in the divine charisma of the bābs. It is doubtful that Ḥudayth herself claimed to have been a bāb-like figure in the Nuṣayrī sense, and her mention here is uncharacteristic even of Nuṣayrī works. But though it perhaps says little about her historical activity, the report suggests that her authority as guardian of the hidden Imam was recognized widely enough to become the focus of further doctrinal elaboration, albeit in terms that soon fell out of use.[80] This report also suggests that Ḥudayth's authority was

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[77] See above and below for the challenges posed to both Ḥasan and Jaʿfar by this class.

[78] Khaṣībī, Hidāya, 276 (this section does not appear in the Beirut ed.).

[79] If this is true, then it is a very remarkable step in this genealogy of divine mediation. Is it a problem that this Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān is described as Ibn Nuṣayr's "son"? Not necessarily. The Nuṣayrīs are noted for their practice of assigning terms of familial relationship to describe initiatory relationships and spiritual hierarchies. Friedman, for example, glosses the word "son" here as meaning "disciple." Yaron Friedman, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 8. A greater problem with attempting to build an argument on a single report like this is that both published editions of the Hidāya appear to have been taken from an identical manuscript which is full of errors. That being said, the succession to the mediatory role of Ibn Nuṣayr would seem to be of central importance, and I can find no other candidate among the historical figures in the Hidāya that would supply an alternative explanation to this genealogy. In addition, the mediatory role of the envoys is clearly present in Khaṣībī's Hidāya, to which is devoted a separate subchapter after the chapters on the bābs.

[80] This can be seen from the fact that this report conflicts with later accounts of the history of spiritual authority in both Twelver and Nuṣayrī traditions. Friedman remarks regarding the

chronologically prior to that of canonical envoys, who themselves appear in the genealogy after her, represented by the second canonical envoy, *but not the first*, a fact that I will return to in Chapter 4.

We also have evidence that Ḥudayth took up a position to direct the sacred economy of the Shiʿa, in particular through her inheritance of the bequest that gave her control of the endowments and revenues of the Imamate, but also in a report which seems to associate her with the pilgrimage to the Imams' house (and shrine),[81] and Khaṣībī's claim that she issued the letters of the hidden Imam.[82] It is difficult to determine to what extent these hints might have been based on Ḥudayth's historical activities. At the very least, she seems to have been an important figure in the earliest phases of speculation about the nature of the continuing Imamate. In this phase, she was depicted in a position of guardianship over the hidden Imam as executor (*waṣī*) for the child Imam, and in the position of mediating envoy to whom the Shiʿa should turn to for guidance in their religion while the Imam remained hidden. She was the first clear rival to Jaʿfar "the Liar" from among the emerging pro-Occultation faction until her death sometime before 281/894–95.[83]

ANOTHER UNCANONIZED ARCHETYPE: THE EUNUCH-CONCUBINE ALLIANCE

An archetype which recurs with some regularity in the Occultation stories is the alliance between a servant and a concubine of Ḥasan. Because of the

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development of the idea of the "Divine Triad" (*Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 73–81) and the transmission of spiritual knowledge from the time of Ibn Nuṣayr to Khaṣībī (ibid., 14–19) that no lasting position in the sequence of spiritual leaders, or in the pantheons of the Nuṣayrīs, was ultimately granted to Ḥudayth, whatever her early importance to Khaṣībī's informants.

[81] The link between the pilgrimage and the mother in this report is not made explicit, but it is nonetheless suggestive: "Jaʿfar b. ʿAmr said: I went out to Samarra (al-ʿAskar) while Umm Abī Muḥammad [the mother of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī] was alive and there was a group with me, and we reached Samarra and my companions wrote to ask permission to do the pilgrimage inside [the house] (*al-ziyāra min dākhil*), with the name of each, man by man. But I said: 'Do not add my name for I do not request permission.' So they left my name out and the permission was issued, 'Enter! Including he who omits to ask permission.'" Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

[82] As mentioned in Khaṣībī, *Hidāya,* 276, quoted above.

[83] Modarressi (*Crisis*, 83) places the death of Jaʿfar at 281/894–95, which, if correct, gives us a *terminus ante quem* for the death of Ḥudayth, for we see clearly in the sources that she died before him. Ḥudayth's importance is mentioned in passing by Modarressi, but characteristically he buries it in a footnote: "[Ḥudayth] was also the one considered by many Imāmites as the caretaker of the office in the absence of her vanished grandson." Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78n126.

intimate, bodily nature of the rituals surrounding death and birth,[84] insiders to the household of the Imam naturally assumed a privileged position in determining how they were carried out and interpreted. Women could be expected to be prominent in questions that touched upon childbearing and child-raising. As we have seen above, it has been suggested that Ḥudayth herself orchestrated the phantom pregnancy of Ḥasan's concubine. However, other stories associate the concubine-mother of the Imam not with Ḥudayth, but with a male servant or eunuch (khādim)[85] known as ʿAqīd or Badr. Ibn Bābūya quotes one report in which Ṣaqīl the concubine and a eunuch named ʿAqīd are involved in the funerary rituals of the Imam, and therefore present at the critical early moments of the new era, acting as key witnesses to testify to the date of the birth of the twelfth Imam.[86]

Servants and householders are common actors in the hagiographies of all the Imams, and so it is no surprise that servants from the household of the Imam should be prominent in providing eyewitness evidence also for the birth of the twelfth Imam.[87] One prominent topos has a servant meeting a believer, then secretly leading to a face-to-face encounter with the Imam.[88] This topos is most highly developed in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*. In one report, the servant named Badr seems to be in direct contact with the Imam.[89] Another report depicts a pair of believers going on a pilgrimage to the hidden Imam in which Badr the eunuch appears as the intermediary working on behalf of the mother of the Imam, Narjis, in Samarra. Narjis, in

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[84] The body of the Imam is of perennial interest in the hadith corpus, an aspect that remains understudied. For a salutary step toward bringing an understanding of the body into our reading of Shiʿi texts, see Matthew Pierce, *Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shiʿism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[85] Here I follow Ayalon's suggestion that *khādim* should be translated as "eunuch" in this period. David Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 67–124. Ayalon is perhaps too definitive in making this case, but given the context of association with the womenfolk of the Imams, I think the translation of "eunuch" makes sense here.

[86] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474–75. This report is transmitted both by the agent Ḥājiz b. Washshāʾ and by the theologian Abū Sahl Ibn Nawbakht, suggesting strong supporters for this formulation of the birth.

[87] See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:514–15; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 435–36; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 268 (in which the servant is named Nasīm).

[88] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:519–20.

[89] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281–82. In this report, dated 262/876, a certain Abū Muḥammad ʿĪsā b. Mahdī al-Jawharī al-Junbulānī goes on Ḥajj with the explicit aim of inquiring after the identity of the Imam at the Imams' ancestral seat of Ṣuryā near Medina. When he goes there, Badr appears and leads him through to an encounter with the hidden Imam, along with various mystical and miraculous occurrences.

turn, is presumed to be mediating directly for the hidden Imam. Badr receives petitions and issues gifts on behalf of the Imam in very much the same way as the agents and envoys of the canonical Twelver narratives do.[90] Instead of the authority of the canonical envoys, however, the narrative is organized around the claims of the concubine-mother and her retinue to mediatory authority.

In another report a man merely known as "the eunuch" (al-khādim) is depicted as operating out of the house of the Imam in Samarra, peremptorily turning away pilgrims:

ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī said that he traveled to Samarra (al-ʿaskar) and came to the house of the Imam and stopped at its gate, asking for permission from him to pose questions which he had asked of our Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] and Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī].[91] The eunuch (al-khādim) came out to him and said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "My name is ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī."

[The servant] said, "Turn back! You do not have permission."[92]

It is not clear if this servant can be identified with Badr or ʿAqīd, but he does appear to be operating as the authorized intermediary for the Imam. Notably, this report fits into the trope of testing an Imam based on knowledge preserved from the past. It is one of several reports which depict a hostile response to a pilgrim who is asking too many questions during the perplexity of the early Occultation.

While the historicity of these individual accounts cannot be assumed, it is plausible that a servant-like figure in the household of the Imam might have held an important intermediary role. These reports from Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* depict rivals to both the envoys and the mother as primary routes to the Imam. The paradigm of the mediatory authority of the concubine and the eunuch, then, should be recognized as an early paradigm within which the later-canonized envoys play no part. These reports do not dominate among our sources, perhaps because they were later effaced or minimized in order to support the narrative of the envoys. However, they indicate dynamics that were generated in response to early events. It seems likely that during the first couple of years after the death of the hidden Imam, the Occultation idea emerged in tandem with claims to mediatory

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[90] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281.
[91] Here is another example of the trope of testing the Imam's knowledge based on knowledge preserved from the past.
[92] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 290.

authority made by relatives and householders of the Imam, before the envoys began to assert their own mediatory authority.

The dispute between Jaʿfar and Ḥudayth opened a traumatic split at the heart of the Imami community. Nonetheless, instead of asserting one party or another to be the legitimate mouthpieces of Imamic guidance, many members of the community are likely to have stood back until the dust settled before adopting a new doctrine of Imamic succession. A position of nonalignment is presented as one of the thirteen or fourteen factions that emerged after the death of the eleventh Imam. Nawbakhtī explains that when these people were asked to say whether the Imam is Jaʿfar or someone else, they would say, "We do not know," but rather reserve judgment, "until the matter is clear for us."[93] While factional rivalries intensified among the core of Ḥasan's household and family, many reports depict the dead Imam's followers expressing doubt or anxiety about the identity of the Imam, then embarking on a search to find him.[94] These stories often end with the description of an ecstatic encounter with the Imam. Many involve someone coming from the east (Balkh, Qumm, Rayy, Nishapur) to Iraq (Kufa, Baghdad, Samarra), though some involve seekers from Egypt or Iraq. A clear subset involves Ḥajj stories or seeking the Imam near his ancestral home of Medina. Some of these reports are clearly older hadith that were repurposed for the new crisis. Thus, one type of report involves the Imam being spotted on Ḥajj, which has clear precedents that lead back to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq who states that, "When you go on Ḥajj, the Imam sees you, but you do not see him."[95] While literary precedents were an important framework for interpreting the possibility of a hidden Imam in the new era, we must not thereby dismiss the possibility that these reports might have accompanied actual experiences in the Ḥijāz or elsewhere. In

[93] See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 89–90, also quoted in full below.
[94] The narrative of the conversion of the Ismaili *dāʿī* from Kufa, Ibn Ḥawshab, in *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa* demonstrates the ubiquity of searching for an Imam among Imamis at this period, and the possibility that this search could easily lead beyond the crisis-ridden proto-Twelver context toward the claims of a charismatic Imam with an active mission. See Abū Ḥanifa al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad, *Founding the Fatimid State: The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire: An Annotated English Translation of al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's Iftitāḥ al-Daʿwa*, trans. Hamid Haji (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 21–26.
[95] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 440.

circumstances of crisis and perplexity, material generated by dreams, ecstatic visions, and speculation, and magnified and distributed by rumor, could have provided important mechanisms for producing meaning for the new epoch.

CONCLUSION

The death of the eleventh Imam produced a vacuum with no clear successor. Despite his strong claim as son of the tenth Imam, Jaʿfar "the Liar" ultimately failed to succeed to the Imamate. Opposing camps generated anti-Jaʿfar propaganda which survives in our sources and can be used to reconstruct key events and early discourses. Within twenty-four hours of the eleventh Imam's death, several events of central symbolism for future understandings of the Occultation had occurred, including funerary rituals for the dead Imam; the claim that one of his concubines was posthumously pregnant with his child; and the dispute over the inheritance of the Imam's property. These events are associated in our sources with various claims to mediate the charisma of the Imamate. Among the figures who are associated with this mediation are mother of the dead Imam, Ḥudayth; servants within the household of the Imam; and the concubine pregnant with the Imam's child. It is likely that the phantom pregnancy of the concubine Ṣaqīl was the earliest claim for a child Imam who would succeed al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī.[96] Despite the ʿAbbasid surveillance which disproved her posthumous pregnancy, the role of the concubine-mother survives as a key element in many of the claims for mediation to the child Imam which were made in the first few years before the clear establishment of the authority of the agents. The claim of the eleventh Imam's mother, Ḥudayth, likewise appears to have provided an important early archetype, which was, however, questioned due to its placement of a woman in the role of mediating Imamic guidance. Such early uncanonized archetypes were later obscured by authors like Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī, who bundled disparate positions into synthesized mosaic accounts of early Occultation-era history. Nevertheless, the conservative hadith-based epistemology of these authors ensured that they relied upon earlier informants who had begun this process of synthesis. These earlier stages (Figure 5) do not quite match the later systematization of the Occultation doctrine, and thus I have been

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[96] While there had been claims of Imams in Occultation before, these had always been adults: famous figures whose followers refused to believe they could die before fulfilling a great mission.

ʿAlī al-Hādī

al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī

Jaʿfar 'the Liar'

Child of al-Ḥasan

Concubine mother
(Ṣaqīl/Narjis)

al-Ḥasan's mother
(Ḥudayth)

Agents
of al-ʿAskarī

Imam's servant
(ʿAqīd/Badr)

──────   Claim of Imamate

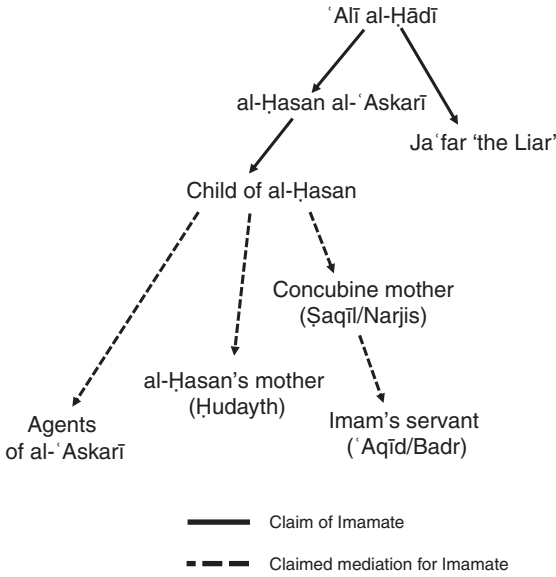▬ ▬ ▬   Claimed mediation for Imamate

FIGURE 5 Early claims to represent the Imamate

able to highlight some intermediate stages which were not fully effaced by
later orthodoxy. Although the idea of the Occultation of the twelfth Imam
may have originated in ideas like the posthumous pregnancy and
Ḥudayth's claim to act as guardian and *waṣī* for the Imamate, these claims
were soon eclipsed by the longer-lived and institutionally embedded claims
made by the agents.

4

The Agents of the *Nāḥiya* in the Era of Perplexity

The first three decades of the Occultation are best seen as an interregnum where authority continued to be contested between pro-Jaʿfar and anti-Jaʿfar factions. This era is well named an era of perplexity (*ḥayra*), though this has been applied also to later phases of the Occultation.[1] In spite of the eventual collapse of the claim that a pregnant concubine carried the dead Imam's child, anti-Jaʿfar factions held onto the idea of an anonymous Imam, eventually crystallizing around the idea that the Imam was a child of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. But no unity was initially achieved. Various claims about the child Imam circulated, most of which were eventually rejected. Though

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[1] Amir-Moezzi has suggested that the term *ḥayra* applies to the decades immediately after the start of the greater Occultation, before scholars like Ibn Bābūya resolved the doubts of the community. *Divine Guide*, 215n557. It is wrong, however, to limit the term merely to this later period. Modarressi notes that from the third and fourth decades of the fourth century, many books written by Imami scholars begin to bear the word *ḥayra* in the title. *Crisis*, 97–98. Andrew Newman, meanwhile, notes with regard to the earliest traditions mentioning twelve Imams, that a report transmitted by Barqī and Ṣaffār uses *ḥayra* as a synonym for Occultation, therefore in the earliest phase of the Occultation, in the late third/ninth century. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīʿism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 92. Certainly the reports that appear to stem from the earliest decades of the Occultation often use the word *ḥayra* as a key term to describe the current crisis. Thus, for example, Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī transmits a rescript from Abū Jaʿfar in which the hidden Imam is said to ask of his followers, "How could they fall into *fitna* and remain hesitating in perplexity (*ḥayra*)?" Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510–11. (See also further instances of the word cited during this period below.) If later writers continued to use the term *ḥayra* to refer to their own ongoing problems, it was largely because it had become current right at the key first decades in which the embryonic Occultation doctrine began to form. See also Andrew Newman, "Between Qumm and the West: The Occultation according to al-Kulayni and al-Katib al-Nuʿmani," in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 102; Halm, *Shiʿism*, 34.

Ḥudayth or the concubine may have been the first to assert the existence of a child of Ḥasan, there are no reports which clearly suggest coordination between Ḥudayth or the concubines and the agents of the Occultation faction. However, as we will see, we do have reports which suggest that agents made claims to authority before the death of Ḥudayth, including rescripts issued in the name of the hidden Imam. It is unclear whether these claims were made in harmony with the claims of Ḥudayth, in parallel, or in opposition to them. In the beginning, obscurity reigns.

In this chapter, I will argue that the era of the envoys only properly begins with the rise of the second canonical envoy, Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī. His rise is most often associated with dates around two decades after Ḥasan's death. But before Abū Jaʿfar asserted his authority as the unique mediator to the hidden Imam, a coalition of the old guard of Ḥasan's agents cooperated with each other to gradually reassert the continuity of the institutions of the Imamate.

A key early source, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, indicates that a rupture occurred when these old guard agents of the eleventh Imam all died out, a fact supported by various narrative reports. I will argue that it was following this rupture that Abū Jaʿfar clearly asserted his unique authority. Before then, however, two aspects of the activities of the agents emerge clearly to have been central to the identity of the Occultation faction: first, an effort to assert the existence of a hidden, anonymous Imam who was not Jaʿfar; and secondly, an effort to reassert the continuity of the institutions of Imamate including the collection of money and the issuing of letters. This second effort was related to the first, as it became necessary to issue decrees which explicitly legitimated the efforts of the agents, in the name of the hidden Imam. This collaboration between the old guard agents to maintain continuity provided minimal conditions of stability to form an institutional crucible within which the Occultation faction could crystallize.

PERIODIZING THE AGENTS OF THE EARLY OCCULTATION

The canonical Twelver narrative of the early Occultation show the "first envoy," ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, being appointed to his position as the first canonical envoy and representative of the hidden Imam directly by Ḥasan's designation.[2] However, though ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was an important pre-Occultation agent, most narrative reports on the earliest period of

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[2] Ibn Bābūya carries what is perhaps the first statement of the orthodox sequence of succession. *Kamāl*, 432.

the Occultation do not support the idea that he acted as an agent during the Occultation era: instead of collecting money and issuing letters, his only major role in the Occultation period seems to have been his attestation to the existence of the hidden Imam.

Early sources like Kulaynī's *Kāfī* and Kashshī's *Rijāl* do not explicitly portray the elder ʿAmrī, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, operating as a fiscal agent in the Occultation era, but rather depict him as acting as a fiscal agent exclusively *prior* to the death of the eleventh Imam. It is only in the following century that Ṭūsī in his *Ghayba* cites a statement asserting that:

The rescripts (*tawqīʿāt*) of Ṣāḥib al-Amr (AS) used to be issued at the hands of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and his son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān to his Shiʿa and the elite retainers of his father, Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS), with command-ing and forbidding and responses to what the Shiʿa asked him when they needed an answer to it, in the handwriting which was issued during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS).[3]

This does not narrate activities. It is a canonizing statement, portraying the acceptance of a fixed sequence of Imamic intermediaries as doctrine. It is later than the earliest reports, having been reported by Ibn Barniya, a descendent of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd through Abū Jaʿfar's daughter. Ibn Barniya might be expected to magnify the role of his famous ancestors,[4] and, indeed, appears as a key architect of the early statement of the four-envoy theory adopted by Ṭūsī, but of which there is no trace in the earlier versions reported by Kulaynī and Kashshī, and which figures only minimally in Ibn Bābūya's work. Ibn Barniya's report is followed by Ṭūsī's own comment, again affirming the canonical sequence of the succession to the envoyship:

When Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd died, his son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān took his position through the designation (*naṣṣ*) of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) and the designation of him by his father, ʿUthmān, by order of the *qāʾim*.[5]

This statement is clearly designed to tick doctrinal boxes, rather than record historical events: Ṭūsī underscores the principle of sequential designation from one envoy to another, providing a sense of unbroken succession to the

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[3] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 221–22. See also a further statement by Ibn Barniya, quoted by Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225–26. This contrasts with a similarly canonizing succession statement in Ibn Bābūya, which, however, does not explicitly mention any activities carried out by ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd either before or after the Occultation era, but just emphasizes his role in the canonical sequence. *Kamāl*, 432.

[4] The same report elevates Ibn Barniya's ancestors by inserting ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd into the role of performing funerary rituals for the eleventh Imam.

[5] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 223.

office. However, he does not rely purely on the designation of agents, but also mentions that an Imamic designation had occurred, so as to fully legitimate the office. This multiple designation allows Ṭūsī to cover his bases, but it also indicates the rather confused nature of the source of authority for the envoys, even at this classical stage of orthodoxy: succession or appointment?[6] I propose that we set aside such canonizing doctrinal assertions. They are not available for independent interpretation by the historian as they involve no context: no mention of time, place, other people involved, or the institutional setting of these activities. Instead we should concentrate on the early narrative reports which depict no clean mechanism for succession to Imamic representation in the Occultation era. Indeed, if there had been such a mechanism, then the great crisis of the fragmentation of the Imami Shiʿa might have been avoided.

Ibn Barniya also offers a statement, again reported by Ṭūsī, that provides us with some dates to work with:

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad [Ibn Barniya] mentioned that Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī (RA) died in the year 304[/916–17], and that he was in charge of this affair (amr) for a good part of fifty years (naḥwan min khamsīn sana), the people carrying their monies to him. And the rescripts (tawqīʿāt) were issued to him in the handwriting which would issue during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) to [his followers] containing important matters in the realm of religion and mundane life, and in which they asked him questions with wondrous answers.[7]

Notably, this statement excludes ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd from holding any unique Occultation-era role as the preeminent fiscal agent of the hidden Imam, seeming thereby to contradict the creedal assertion of such a role in Ibn Barniya's statement quoted above. Abū Jaʿfar died in 304/916–17, or as it is elsewhere stated, 305/917,[8] and if he was the preeminent agent for fifty years, then he would have begun his tenure around 254/870, four years before the death of the eleventh Imam, meaning he would have been the first Occultation-era envoy instead of his father, unless the position of envoy were shared. We do not need to accept the fifty years at face value, but this does indicate that even Ibn Barniya, the major legitimist of the four-envoy theory, appears to exclude the first envoy in this periodization.

There are other reports in which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is excluded, including that of Abū ʿAlī b. Hammām al-Iskāfī,[9] who again suggests that Abū Jaʿfar's

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[6] The assertion of both succession and coterminous authority is also implied by some versions of the thiqa hadith, which will be addressed below.
[7] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 228.   [8] At the end of Jumādā al-Ūlā. Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 227–28.
[9] Ibid., 248.

authority began upon the death of Ḥasan, with no mention of an Occultation-era role at all for ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Ibn Hammām was a Baghdadi traditionist, who died in 332/943–44 or 336/948,[10] and like Ibn Barniya, he was a representative of the crystallizing pro-envoy orthodoxy with no incentive to reduce the Occultation-era role of ʿUthmān b Saʿīd. He is likely, instead, to be articulating an intermediate stage in the crystallization of orthodoxy before ʿUthmān b Saʿīd was clearly canonized as the first of four envoys. Meanwhile, another report, mentioned in Chapter 3, erects an alternative, never-canonized succession of Imamic intermediaries, suggesting that Ḥudayth, al-ʿAskarī's mother, passed the Imamic legacy directly on to Abū Jaʿfar,[11] again excluding ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. These details suggest that reporters both inside and outside the developing Twelver orthodoxy in the early fourth/tenth century did not see ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as the supreme Occultation-era representative of the Imam in his day.

ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was indisputably a prominent agent under Ḥasan,[12] but the narrative reports never depict him acting as an agent after Ḥasan's death.[13] No birth or death dates, alas, survive for ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, though one report does establish a *terminus ante quem* for his death at 280/893–94, and suggests that his son Abū Jaʿfar was pressing his claim to authority around then, legitimating himself through the prestige and authority of his father.[14] All of this means that unless we discover narratives that show ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd acting as an agent of the hidden Imam, we should put this aspect of his role in parentheses. However, though we cannot consider him as an Occultation-era agent dealing with money and letters, we should certainly see ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as he appears in narrative reports: a key witness invoked to attest to the existence of the hidden Imam.

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[10] Ansari, *L'imamat*, 43–45.   [11] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276.

[12] See, Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:844–48.

[13] Only one report provides a possible exception, though offers ambivalent evidence, and comes with a muscular intervention from its redactor who says: "A rescript from the Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān) (AS) which was issued to al-ʿAmrī and his son (RAA) which was transmitted by Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh [al-Qummī]." The report itself proceeds as follows: "Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿfar (RAA) said: I found it written down (muthbat) from him [al-ʿAmrī?] (RA) . . . It has reached us what you both [ʿAmrīs] mentioned, regarding what al-Maythamī informed you about al-Mukhtār, and his debates (munāẓarāt) with the person he met and his argumentation with him that there was no successor (khalaf) except Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī ['the Liar'], and [al-Mukhtār's] correction of him (taṣdīqihi iyyāhu)." This, then, indicates that the ʿAmrīs were involved in early debates, and that the authority of the hidden Imam was invoked, but it strongly suggests that it was a discovered text distributed later by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿfar. No mention of hierarchy or the activities of the ʿAmrīs is provided. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510–11.

[14] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.

A TOUCHSTONE FOR DATING THE ROLE OF THE AGENTS:
KITĀB AL-TANBĪH

While Ibn Barniya asserted that Abū Jaʿfar died in 304/916–17, after a tenure of around fifty years, our earliest datable account for the activities of the pro-Occultation agents presents a contradictory story. An excerpt from Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Kitāb al-tanbīh* is preserved in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl al-dīn*. The *Tanbīh* was written around 290/903.[15] We have no reason to think that Ibn Bābūya tampered with the information it provides, beyond abridging it, as it represents an interim stage in the canonization of the Occultation doctrine which already seems archaic by the time of Ibn Bābūya.[16] Abū Sahl's references to the agents serve the purpose of theological rationalization, certainly, but his account is our closest clearly datable text[17] to the events themselves, and so we approach it with particular interest. Due to the fragmentary nature of the references to the envoys/agents, I will not now quote at length from the work as it appears in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*,[18] but rather I present the chronology of the early Occultation period, paraphrasing from Abū Sahl's piecemeal remarks:

In 260/874, the eleventh Imam died. All of the trusted men (*thiqāt*) among the eleventh Imam's retainers (*rijāl*) attested to the Imamate of the son. These men came to a unanimous[19] consensus that al-Ḥasan had left behind as successor a child who is the Imam, and they ordered the people not to ask about his name and to hide that from his enemies.[20]

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[15] Klemm suggests that it was written between 290/903 and 300/913. "*Sufarāʾ*," 147. However, the later date is unlikely, because the text states that the Imam has been hidden "for thirty years or thereabouts." Modarressi also notes that the text was finished around 290/903. *Crisis*, 88.

[16] Among other elements, the *Tanbīh* represents an early conception of the lesser and the greater Occultation. In it, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī already suggests that the greater Occultation had been initiated by the death of the old guard agents of Ḥasan. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93. However, elsewhere, Ibn Bābūya indicates that the greater Occultation occurs after the death of the fourth envoy, Samurī. *Kamāl*, 432. See discussion below.

[17] It was produced around the same time as the influential interventions of ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, including his redaction of the *thiqa* hadith, see this chapter, below, and Chapter 5. Other early texts, like al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī's and Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī's heresiographies, do not clearly refer to the agents.

[18] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88–94.

[19] This unanimity is, of course, wishful thinking, as there were clear splits among Ḥasan's faithful followers. But from Abū Sahl's point of view, presumably the very denial of the existence of the hidden Imam would remove these figures from the category of a faithful Imami.

[20] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 92–93.

From 260/874 to 262/876, the caliphal authorities (*sulṭān*) searched for the Imam, appointing watchers over the eleventh Imam's houses and concubines, and the twelfth Imam disappeared due to the fear inspired by this search.

Between around 260/874 and around 280/893, a group of the eleventh Imam's trusted associates (*thiqāt*) acted as the Imam's representatives, issuing letters and handling money on his behalf, until they all died out.

After 280/893 for a few years (until around 285/898?), all of the trusted associates of the eleventh Imam had died out, except one man who survived for a while longer (until c. 287/890?) to be the unique representative of the old guard. There was unanimity regarding his trustworthiness and probity.

Thereafter until 290/903, after the death of the one remaining representative, correspondence with the Imam was cut off. However, there was a sense of connection to the hidden Imam even at the time of writing of the *Tanbīh* (290/903). Abū Sahl makes a mysterious parenthetical allusion that the Imam "has up until this time, someone among his Shiʿa, the hidden reliable ones (*al-thiqāt al-mastūrīn*), who claims that he is a Gate (*bāb*) to him and a connection (*sabab*) who gives [the Imam's] commands and his forbiddings from him to his Shiʿa."[21]

Abū Sahl, then, recounting what were fresh experiences to him, states that the eleventh Imam's agents had all died out a couple of decades after the eleventh Imam's death. This presents a problem for interpreting the dating provided by Ibn Barniya, for if Abū Jaʿfar was really in a position of recognized authority upon the death of the eleventh Imam, then he should have died along with the other old guard agents, several years before the *Tanbīh* was written in 290/903. The *Tanbīh*, indeed, provides no conception of a single agent or envoy leading the community in the first years. This again undermines the very idea of the individual envoyship of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, or his son in the first phase of the Occultation era. By contrast, its depiction of the leadership belonging to a group of several men is consistent with the picture presented by the earliest narrative reports in Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, and Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* in which several uncanonized, sometimes anonymous men acted in no particular hierarchy to maintain the institutions of the Imamate in the name of an absent Imam. If we are to believe Abū Sahl, then, we must either reject the testimony of Ibn Barniya

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[21] Ibid. I will discuss this idea in more detail in Chapter 5. This idea slightly alters the judgment of Klemm, who asserts that in the *Tanbīh*, "there is no mention at all of a continuously functioning *sifāra*." "*Sufarāʾ*," 147. She is not wrong, but she does not acknowledge that even so, there was a continuous effort to assert the existence of some kind of mediation, albeit in times of institutional rupture and reformation. There was an idea, indeed a theological need, for a continuously functioning structure of mediation, from which the envoyship (*sifāra*) emerged, but the *Tanbīh* merely shows this in its embryonic stage.

and the canonized conception of a sequential succession of authority through the canonical envoys, or we must at least acknowledge that there were competing visions of authority in this era. This is not a mere abstraction. The names and activities of these old guard agents appear in our sources operating with little or no dependency upon the canonical envoys, albeit with unnamed contacts representing an anonymous Imam in Samarra. These unnamed contacts, however, often appear to be servants of the Imamic household: eunuchs and concubines, rather than agents.

Returning to the question of periodization, given Abū Jaʿfar's death date, it is clear that Abū Sahl did not recognize him as one of the agents of the old guard. Instead, as we shall see, Abū Jaʿfar was a representative of a younger generation, who had to establish his authority once the old guard agents were dead. This is corroborated by a number of reports which challenge the authority of Abū Jaʿfar as a neophyte, which we will address in Chapter 5. The death of the final member of the old guard appears to have been a rupture almost as traumatic as the death of the eleventh Imam himself,[22] to be eventually resolved by the rise of Abū Jaʿfar as envoy. This rupture and the canonization of Abū Jaʿfar as envoy is crucial in our understanding of how we should read the hadiths. Many of the reports that we will discuss in this chapter show evidence of an early stage of generation, and a second stage, after the rupture, in which they were compiled and redacted to provide support for the conceptual needs of the post-rupture community: in particular to support the idea of mediation of the hidden Imam by envoys. The reputations, roles, and activities of figures like ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Ḥājiz b. Yazīd, and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq all show evidence of retrospective editing.

WHO WERE THE OLD GUARD AGENTS?

Who, then, were the old guard agents alluded to by Abū Sahl? A report cited by Ibn Bābūya from a certain Muḥammad al-Kūfī lists all of the agents from different regions who were said to have seen the hidden Imam, including both members of the old guard and later figures. This gives us an important index for the makeup of the early Occultation faction. In Table 3, I provide the names from Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list, with additional information gleaned from other sources that allows us to place these figures as old guard or younger generation agents.

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[22] As one figure puts it, "I said, 'O people, this is perplexity (ḥayra). We do not know the bāb in this time!'" Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī, the younger, *Dalāʾil al-imāma* (Qumm: Muʾassasat al-baʿtha, 1413/1992–93), 519–20.

TABLE 3 Agents who saw the Imam, as reported by Muḥammad al-Kūfī[23]

Name	Affiliation	Generation
al-ʿAmrī [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, or Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr]	Baghdad. Canonical first envoy in Twelver tradition	Older
His son [Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān, Abū Jaʿfar]	Baghdad. Canonical second envoy in Twelver tradition. Son of al-ʿAmrī, above	Younger
Ḥājiz	Baghdad and Samarra. Agent dealing with the east: Merv, Balkh.[24] Doubts surrounding his authority were countered by a rescript issued in the name of the hidden Imam.[25]	Older
al-Bilālī	Baghdad. Prominent agent of eleventh Imam. Became an opponent of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī	Older
al-ʿAṭṭār	Baghdad. probably refers to ʿAlī b. Sulaymān b. Rashīd al-ʿAṭṭār al-Baghdādī, mentioned by Kashshī as being a keeper of a storehouse (khazāna) on behalf of the eleventh Imam.[26]	Older
al-ʿĀṣimī	Kufa. Transmitter of hadith highlighting Ḥājiz's role	Younger?

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[23] The report is narrated by Muḥammad b. Abī ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūfī, and transmitted by two generations of the Asadī clan of Rayy, which was prominent in the era of the envoys Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ: both Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī, an agent for Rayy (who was said to have succeeded to the authority of Ḥājiz the agent) and his son Abū ʿAlī. The report, therefore, is very much a picture from someone within the clique of pro-Occultation agents representing their own. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442–43.

[24] Ibid., 488.   [25] Ibid., 498–99.

[26] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 406–7. Given that this ʿAṭṭār is listed among the agents from Baghdad, he should not be confused with the family of Qummī traditionalists which include Yaḥyā b. Muthannā, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAṭṭār, and his son, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, who are prominent transmitters of hadith asserting the existence of the hidden Imam (see Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl (or Asmāʾ muṣannifī al-shīʿa)*, ed. Mūsā al-Shubayrī al-Zanjānī; (Qumm: Muʾassasat al-nashr al-islāmī: 1407/1986), 353).

TABLE 3 Continued

Name	Affiliation	Generation
Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Mahziyār	Ahwāz. Famously doubted the Occultation and the envoyship of Abū Jaʿfar, but was eventually won over. Son of an agent	Older
Aḥmad b. Isḥāq	Qumm. Agent, scholar, and hadith transmitter. In the *thiqa* hadith he appears in favor of the ʿAmrīs and *ghayba*. He appears as the Qummī delegate to Samarra to find the Imam. In Ibn Rustum's *Dalāʾil* he appears as the major agent of the hidden Imam.	Older
Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ	Hamadān	Older?
al-Bassāmī	Rayy	?
al-Asadī	Rayy. Either Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī, the agent at Rayy who succeeded Ḥājiz, or perhaps his father[27]	Younger
al-Qāsim b. al-ʿAlāʾ	Ādharbayjān. Sent money from *waqf* of eleventh Imam to *wikāla*.[28] Agent since time of Imam Hādī;[29] succeeded in post by his son Ḥasan[30]	Older

[27] There is a problem here, as Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī is in the *isnād* of this report. Unless this is a pseudepigraphic ascription, it would seem unlikely (though not impossible) that he should be one of the agents listed in it, suggesting that it might be an Asadī of an earlier generation, though the location at Rayy suggests that it is probably of the same family of agents. As we will see, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī appears to have belonged to the second generation of agents in the Occultation era, based on his death date reported in the *rijāl* literature; see below.

[28] Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.   [29] Ibid., 95.   [30] Ibid., 124.

TABLE 3 Continued

Name	Affiliation	Generation
Muḥammad b. Shādhān [b. Nuʿaym/ Naʿīm]	Nishapur. Commended in a rescript (*tawqīʿ*) of the hidden Imam as "a man of our Shiʿa," and of the *ahl al-bayt*.[31] He sent money he collected to Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī at Rayy.[32]	Younger?

This list aggregates early Occultation reports to give a general sense of where the Occultation idea found support. However, as we shall see, by no means did all these figures represent a unified front, especially on the question of the envoyship. Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list is useful, but it should be understood as a retrospective amalgamation designed to provide evidence for the existence of a massively corroborated consensus about the existence of the Imam.[33] From this list, there are two key figures who appear in narrative reports as actively engaged in the distinctive offices of agentship (collecting money in the name of the Imam, and issuing letters and commands), and who appear most connected to the claim of mediation with the hidden Imam: Ḥājiz b. Yazīd and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq.[34] We will return to these figures in due course.

EUPHEMISMS FOR THE IMAMIC INSTITUTIONS: *NĀḤIYA* AND *GHARĪM*

Named agents appear in some reports, but the central Imamic institutions are often referred to anonymously: in particular those figures who are

[31] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483–85.
[32] Ibid., 485–86, 509; Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 4–5.
[33] Numerous theologians, starting with Abū Sahl, rely on the idea that the hidden Imam was so widely attested that his existence is established like any other fact of life attested by a huge number of witnesses.
[34] Another name that occurs is Abū al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad al-Wakīl. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 293. This may be the same as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, whom al-Shaykh al-Mufīd calls "the envoy (*safīr*) in those days." Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād fī maʿrifat ḥujjat Allāh ʿalā al-ʿibād* (Beirut: Muʾassasat āl al-bayt, 1414/1993), 2:360. However, the same hadith as reported in Kulaynī's *Kāfī* does not use the word "envoy" (*safīr*) suggesting that this is a post-Nuʿmānī identification. *Kāfī*, 1:520–21. Sachedina suggests that "besides the Four Agents there were many others who were known to hold the *sifāra* of the Imam and were entrusted to collect *khums* tax." *Messianism*, 88. However, as we will see, it seems more likely that these "others" were in fact major figures in their own right before the four-envoy paradigm was canonized.

depicted as mediating for the hidden Imam from within the dead Imam's house are often referred to using vague and euphemistic terms, such as *al-gharīm* (creditor; the one to whom debts are due)[35] or *al-dār* (the house, the household).[36] In particular the term *al-nāḥiya* is prominent. This word literally means "side," "corner," or "region." The meaning of the word in this context is not clear. Modarressi follows modern Twelver usage by extending it into the phrase *al-nāḥiya al-muqaddasa* and translating it as "The Holy Threshold."[37] But this phrase appears nowhere among the earliest sources, and its translation as "threshold" derives from no clear contemporary cues, nor follows the literal meaning of the word. Klemm translates, or rather interprets, *al-nāḥiya* as "the community administration,"[38] which fits the activities of the *nāḥiya*, but bears no relation to the semantic range of the word, and misses the point of the allusive equivocation behind its usage. Instead, we should understand the appearance of the word *nāḥiya* as a new terminology developed to cope with the ambivalence of a new situation. There are two key dimensions of this word that hitherto have not been noted. First, the term was not applied

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[35] The word *al-gharīm* appears in financial contexts where members of the community are making payments of canonical taxes. It has been said that this word refers to the Imam. Massignon deduces that *al-gharīm* is a nickname for the Imam. Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) 1:308. However, in the early Occultation narratives, it is hard to distinguish this term from the agents who represent the Imams, and appears virtually synonymous with *al-nāḥiya*. Thus, if *al-gharīm* does refer to the Imam, it refers to him in his capacity as one to whom something is owed: i.e. the canonical taxes. While the term implies the existence of an Imam to guarantee the system, in practical terms, it refers to the central financial institutions of his *wikāla* network. See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493, 498–99. In this sense, the Imam and his administrative institutions are combined and indistinguishable.

[36] *Al-dār*, the house, refers primarily to the house of the Imam. It is no coincidence that in the earliest phase of the Occultation, Imamic representation appears to be focused on servants operating from within the dead Imam's house. The term can also be taken to refer to the family and household of the Imam (see Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498) and the Imam himself (see, for example, Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 394). The association of the word *dār* with the institutions of the *wikāla* network is of interest in that it might give a clue as to informal structures in which the *wikāla* network might have originated – in the retinue or household of the Imam. The situating of power within the household of powerful men is familiar to us from descriptions of households of caliphs and viziers of the time, whom it was necessary to approach initially by making contact with members of their retinue and staff. (See, for example, Maaike van Berkel, "Political Intercession at the Court of Caliph al-Muqtadir," *Revue des Mondes Muselmans et de la Mediterranee* 140 (2016): 181–90.) It is no surprise to us, then, that the biography of the agent ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, credited by Twelver tradition as the first envoy, hints at the possibility that he may have been a household servant of the tenth and eleventh Imams. Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 390.

[37] Modarressi, *Crisis*, 11.   [38] Klemm, "*Sufarāʾ*," 145.

to the Imamate in the pre-Occultation period. I have found just one instance in which a pre-Occultation figure is mentioned as participating in the *nāḥiya*, and this is clearly back-projected.[39] Secondly, by using this term, the Imam is not named, but is implicitly conflated with the institutions that represent him. This is exactly what the agents needed: a word which did not make explicit claims, but seemed to associate them with continuing institutions of Imamate. In the Samarra period of the ʿAbbasid court, the word *nāḥiya* was also used in the sense of "the faction" or "the party," or "the retinue" of a great man: for example, the faction of Waṣīf or the faction of Bughā.[40] It is not a stretch to see this same word used to refer to the retinue of the Imam in Samarra, probably originally referring to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and then by extension to Ḥasan's agents who remained loyal to him and antagonistic to Jaʿfar "the Liar" after Ḥasan's death. I will tend to use the word *nāḥiya* untranslated, in order to retain its ambiguity, rather than making assumptions about the identity of the people to whom it refers.

REFERRING TO THE IMAM

The use of euphemisms to avoid explicitly naming the people involved in the Occultation-era institutions of the Imamate is paralleled by the antipathy of naming the Imam himself. Abū Sahl connects this antipathy to the era of the last man left alive from the old guard agents: "He ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*) and not to broadcast anything of the condition (*amr*) of the Imam."[41] The prohibition of naming the Imam is clearly early[42] and is also associated with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī[43] and his

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[39] Najāshī mentions a certain agent, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī, as being the latest of three generations from the same family who served the Imams, referring to them as agents of the *nāḥiya*. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 344. This is a clear instance of an Occultation-era usage pushed back from an Occultation-era agent, and then loosely applied to earlier agents in his family. In the pre-Occultation period, the word *nāḥiya* is sometimes applied to the different regions that profess allegiance to the Imam, and sometimes used to indicate regions that have been assigned to the jurisdiction of a particular agent (see Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 364, 376) but this is clearly not the sense in which it is used when applied to the central institutions of the hidden Imamate.

[40] In his work on the role of the Turks in the court politics of the Samarra period, Matthew Gordon translates *nāḥiya* as "camp," or "party," for example "Waṣīf's party" (*nāḥiyat Waṣīf*), referring to the retinue of the powerful Turkish general in Samarra. Gordon, *A Thousand Swords*, 108, 114.

[41] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

[42] Appearing, for example, in the account regarding Ḥudayth's guardianship of the child Imam. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501.

[43] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:329–30, discussed as the *thiqa* hadith, below.

son after him.[44] The prohibition of speculation as to the identity of the Imam may have been strategically useful in reducing perplexity by minimizing dissension over competing doctrinal solutions, and was possible due to its consistency with the already well-established ethos of Imami *taqiyya*.[45] *Taqiyya* allowed for various different hermeneutic communities to subsist within the same broad Imami church, recognizing the same Imam, while holding on to different beliefs. In practice, however, the prohibition on naming the Imam conflicted with contrary motivations toward circulating a name for the hidden Imam. Eventually, the hidden Imam was identified with the millennial Mahdī. Often, the hidden Imam is referred to using the redolent revolutionary or millennial monikers of Shiʿi tradition, the *qāʾim*, and the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*).[46] Earlier traditions had said that the Mahdī would be named after the Prophet Muḥammad.[47] These competing prerogatives resulted in solutions such as the use of separated letters to name the hidden Imam: M-Ḥ-M-D.[48] The spread in naming practices provides a further window onto the process of creation of meaning to fill the vacuum left by the absent Imam.

REJECTING JAʿFAR: ḤĀJIZ, THE AGENT WHO FLIPPED?

One agent who was not incorporated into the canonical sequence of the envoys, but appears as a crucial early figure in the narrative reports, is Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʾ. The narratives that relate to Ḥājiz present an alternative, highly ambivalent vision of the genesis of the Occultation faction in the shift away from Jaʿfar "the Liar" to the acceptance of a hidden child Imam. I will spend a little time here to analyze these reports, because the early Occultation-era role of Ḥājiz – and it appears to have momentarily been a key role – has been almost entirely overlooked by historians of this period. Ḥājiz, also known as al-Ḥājizī, is depicted in

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[44] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 226–27.

[45] See, for example, Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shīʿī Views on *Taqiyya*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no. 3 (1975): 395–402.

[46] Sachedina makes the case that there is a chronological shift in the use of the titles Qāʾim and Mahdī. See Sachedina, *Messianism*, 58–64. I see no evidence for this, within the more precise periodization I offer here, but the issue deserves a more systematic treatment.

[47] See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:446.

[48] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:514. Abū Sahl is recorded as having believed at some point that the Imam of the Age was the son or descendant of Ḥasan's son. This is recorded by Ibn al-Nadīm. See Klemm, "*Sufarāʾ*," 151n82.

various reports as acting as an agent to the hidden Imam, receiving the canonical taxes, and issuing rescripts. In Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list of agents who saw the Imam, Ḥājiz is listed as one of the agents for Baghdad[49] but, mysteriously, al-Asadī who operated from Rayy is depicted as succeeding him. Also, the donors who sought Ḥājiz came from the east. Most likely, then, he was based in Baghdad, but held responsibilities for collecting money from areas toward the east including Rayy. The exact relationship between Ḥājiz and the Imam is not fully specified in these narratives: it is unclear whether Ḥājiz was directly in touch with the Imam, or if there was a higher intermediary over his head with whom he was in contact. Some reports suggest that even Ḥājiz did not quite know whom he was representing.

Nothing is known about Ḥājiz beyond the few mentions of him among the Occultation narratives. He was not scholar or a figure with distinguishing features which would lead to the preservation of information about him in the *rijāl* works. His name is rather rare and unusual. Ibn Ḥajar has no record of the name Ḥājiz with that spelling in his guide to the orthography of names (including unusual ones), *Tabṣīr al-muntabih bi-taḥrīr al-mushtabih*,[50] suggesting that this was either a nickname,[51] a foreign word or name, or simply an error. Certainly, the use of nicknames is well-attested for agents in this period, including for first and second envoys and the secretive associates of Shalmaghānī. His *nisba*, al-Washshāʾ, suggests that he was a fine textile merchant, a not-uncommon calling among the prominent followers of the Imams in this period,[52] and perhaps this is an indication of wealth. In this he is comparable to the ʿAmrīs, both of whom were referred to by the epithet "the Oil Merchant," indicating mercantile activities comparable to many agents.[53]

Two key aspects of Ḥājiz's career are important: first, his apparent transition from supporting Jaʿfar to being one of the central agents of an emergent Occultation faction; and secondly, the doubt which was felt by some regarding his authority.

[49] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442–43.
[50] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tabṣīr al-muntabih bi-taḥrīr al-mushtabih* (Cairo: Dār al-miṣriyya li-l-taʾlīf wa-l-tarjama, 1384/1964).
[51] What this nickname might refer to is obscure. The root of the word means to block, hinder, prevent, isolate, or conceal. We might speculate, therefore, that this name refers to his function of mediation, interposing himself between the community and the Imam, much as a vizier or a chamberlain (*ḥājib*) does. In this case, however, we would not expect the word to be applied without the definite article. However, in our sources the name exists both with and without the definite article.
[52] See Chapter 2.   [53] See Asatryan, "Bankers."

The Ambiguous Allegiance of Ḥājiz

In one of several reports in which a Qummī delegation arrives in Samarra soon after the death of the eleventh Imam, we see Ḥājiz present, alongside ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and ʿAqīd the eunuch. All are seen to respond to the problematic claims of Jaʿfar "the Liar" in different ways. Neither Ḥājiz nor ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd appears favorably, from the perspective of later doctrine. Ḥājiz appears in a particularly poor light. In it, Ḥājiz accompanies Jaʿfar "the Liar" in the funerary rituals, addressing Jaʿfar with the honorific "*sayyidī*."[54] When the child Imam appears suddenly and prevents Jaʿfar "the Liar" from praying over the corpse of the eleventh Imam to do so himself, Ḥājiz appears to side with Jaʿfar against the child, saying, "O my lord (*sayyidī*), who is the boy so that we may set up proof against him (*li-nuqīma al-ḥujjata ʿalayhi*)?"[55]

In the same report, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is depicted in a very minor role. It is not ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd but ʿAqīd the eunuch who appears to be the closest to the Imams, announcing the shrouding of the Imam, and speaking to the Qummīs on behalf of the child Imam who miraculously predicts the contents of the Qummīs' canonical tax offerings. All of this presents rather ambivalent evidence, perhaps reflecting the ambivalent opinions of the community at the time. But at the very least, we may see in this report a suggestion that Ḥājiz was compromised in his dealings with Jaʿfar.

The suggestion that Ḥājiz had an initially ambivalent relationship to Jaʿfar is also present in a report from a later source, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib* by Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī (d. 1164 or 1165).[56] In this report, a woman from Dīnawar entrusts money for the Imam to a man called Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ (not a relation of the third envoy) saying to him, "O Ibn Abī Rawḥ, you are the most reliable of those in our *nāḥiya* [i.e. the district of Dīnawar]." Ibn Abī Rawḥ expects to take the money to Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī "the Liar." He heads first to Baghdad, where he meets Ḥājiz, suggesting that the recognition of Jaʿfar as Imam coexisted with the recognition of Ḥājiz as an Imamic agent in Baghdad:

I carried the money and I traveled out until I entered Baghdad, and I came to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʾ. I greeted him and sat, then he said, "Do you have a request (*ḥāja*)?"

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[54] This term is often used for Imams in Imami reports, though it was in general use as a term of respect in society more broadly, and Jaʿfar may have been addressed in such language merely as a courtesy to his status as being from the *ahl al-bayt*.

[55] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–76.

[56] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Alī Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, ed. Nabīl Riḍā; ʿUlwān (Qumm: Muʾassasat anṣāriyān, 1411/1990–91), 594–95.

I replied, "This money was paid to me so that I may pay it to you. Tell me how much it is, and who paid it to me, and if you inform me, then I will give it to you."

He said, "I have not been ordered to take it. This note (*ruqʿa*) came to me regarding your affair, for in it, it says: 'Do not take from Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ, but rather send him to us in Samarra.'"

I said, "There is no god but God, this is the most glorious thing I have wished." I left with [the money] and I arrived at Samarra. I said, "I will begin with Jaʿfar ['the Liar']." Then I thought it over and said, "I will begin with them [i.e. the agents?], in case the burden is with them, and if not, I will pass on to Jaʿfar."

I went down to the door of the house of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS), and a servant came out to me and said, "Are you Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Read this note (*ruqʿa*)."[57]

In the note, the hidden Imam writes, fulfilling the donor's dearest expectations, by displaying miraculous knowledge of the circumstances in which the money was given to Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ (as Ḥājiz was unwilling or unable to do). In addition, the Imam gives instructions of what to do with the wealth he carries. Among it are three pearls, and he is instructed to "give them to our slave girl so-and-so (*fulāna*) for we have made a gift of them to her," and with the rest he is told to "go to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz and take from him what he gives you as your expenses (*nafaqa*) for your accommodation." In addition, he is told, "And, O Ibn Abī Rawḥ, do not return to speaking of Jaʿfar."[58] While this account is in a relatively late source, its focus on the person of Ḥājiz rather than one of the four canonical envoys suggests that it may contain some early details. Although the narrative depicts Ḥājiz as central in the Occultation-era Imamic institutions, his position is nonetheless ambivalent: he is not allowed, in this case, to accept the money from the Dīnawarī donors. He seems unable to give clear instructions about where the donors should send their money other than implying that the Imamic institutions in Samarra remain intact. On arriving in Samarra, the donor does not seem sure who the Imam is, and initially decides to approach Jaʿfar "the Liar." Does this suggest that Ḥājiz had good relations with Jaʿfar "the Liar" or was at least hedging his bets while attempting to maintain institutional continuity as an agent? In further reports, however, we see Ḥājiz more firmly established as mediating money and letters from the hidden Imam.

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[57] Ibid.   [58] Ibid., 595–96.

Addressing Doubt: The First Rescripts?

Ḥājiz's agentship was surrounded by doubt. In a pattern to be repeated throughout the era of the agents of the hidden Imam, doubt was addressed by the dissemination of legitimating rescripts in the name of the hidden Imam. One of these rescripts, reported in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, bears the date 260/874. If we accept this dating, it would be perhaps the earliest of the rescripts issued on behalf of the hidden Imam.[59] In it, one agent is depicted as collecting money, but then doubting about the status of another agent whom he is expected to send it to:

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Qaṭṭānī said:
Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd [the transmitter's father] had doubts about the status (*amr*) of Ḥājiz[60] al-Washshāʾ so he gathered money and the order came out to him in the year 60 [i.e. 260], "There is no doubt about us, nor is there doubt about him who carries out our orders (*man yaqūmu bi-amrinā*). So, send what you have to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd."[61]

This language suggests a formal investiture of Ḥājiz as a representative of Imamic authority. Kulaynī's *Kāfī* reproduces the language of the rescript which emphasizes yet more strongly the role of Ḥājiz as a full Imamic deputy, prefiguring the office of envoy: "There is no doubt about us, nor about he who stands in our place (*man qāma maqāmanā*) so, by our order, return what you have to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd."[62] Another report in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl* reproduces the same text to refer to Ḥājiz's relationship with an anonymous Imam in Samarra within a narrative of a believer's doubt being vanquished through supernatural inspiration.[63]

Two key facts must be recognized in reading these short, elusive narratives. Firstly, there is no mention of who the hidden Imam is; whether a child of Ḥasan, an adult, the guardian of a posthumously pregnant

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[59] Unless, of course, we imagine this rescript to have been issued by the eleventh Imam, before his death.

[60] The text reads "Ḥujr," rather than "Ḥājiz," but we can see that it clearly refers to Ḥājiz, based on the similarity of this report to those in the Twelver sources, and the fact of the *nisba* al-Washshāʾ.

[61] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 278. See also the slightly different phrasing, transmitted also by al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, but without the date: "nor is there doubt about him who takes our place through our order (*yaqūm maqāmanā bi-amrinā*)." Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:521. Khaṣībī's report may be the result of an error: a simple omission of the word *maqām*.

[62] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:521. The phrase "he who stands in our place (*man qāma maqāmanā*)" is a common phrase for designation or deputization, sometimes used to refer to the succession of one Imam to another, and later, to the succession of one envoy to another. Ibid., 327; Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 223.

[63] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498–99.

concubine, or someone else. Thus, although this shows an early instance of an agent issuing rescripts on behalf of an anonymous Imam, this cannot support any particular claims about the identity of the Imam, whether child or adult. Rather it is a bare assertion of the existence of an Imam, and Ḥājiz's legitimacy as his agent. Indeed, this rescript seems to assume that either the Imam was understood to have been an adult in 260/874, mature enough to formulate official decrees,[64] or that an agent was formulating them on his behalf.[65] Certainly, the possibility must be borne in mind that Ḥājiz was never a spokesperson for the child Imam, but rather a representative of the assertion that there had to be an Imam out there somewhere: the thesis of "it must be so-ism" (*lā-buddiyya*).[66] In terms of his relationship with other agents, Ḥājiz might very well have been the Baghdad branch of an evidentiary mechanism which relied on servants or agents in Samarra to generate texts like the rescript quoted above. But "he who stands in our place," suggests something more than the mere appointment of a functionary, but rather a deputization of Imamic authority, which, in retrospect, looks like an emerging envoy prototype.

Once the four-envoy theory had been established, the envoy-like functions taken on by the ultimately uncanonized Ḥājiz may have been problematic. One report shows signs of having been redacted to subordinate him to the canonical envoys. This addition appears to be late, after the fourth/tenth century. In an earlier version of the report, cited by Ibn Bābūya, a doubting man from Merv is advised to send 1,000 dinars that he has collected for the *nāḥiya* to Ḥājiz.[67] The report is repeated in all of its main points in the sixth-/twelfth-century work of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ*, but with the insertion of a passage of dialogue in which the subordination of Ḥājiz to the ʿAmrīs is made clear: "He said, 'I have money for the creditor (*al-gharīm*), so what do you order me to do?' I said, 'Send it to Ḥājiz.' He said to me, 'Is there anyone above Ḥājiz?' And I said,

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[64] Perhaps Jaʿfar or al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in Occultation.

[65] Or that it was disseminated within the context of the acknowledgment of the miraculous precociousness of the child Imam. This latter possibility certainly is corroborated by miracle stories of the child Imam's precocity.

[66] In one tract by the theologian Ibn Qiba, extant in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, a pro-Jaʿfar disputant derisively used the term *lā-buddiyya* to argue that it was absurd that the Twelvers rejected a visible, present candidate, Jaʿfar, in favor of a doctrine based on theological reasoning, but without supporting any physical representative. The Twelver theologian Ibn Qiba defended the Twelver position, noting that his attackers, the party of Jaʿfar "the Liar," also adhered to an "it-must-be-so-ite" principle that there must be an Imam upon earth. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 157–62. See also Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 54–55, 139.

[67] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

'Yes, the Shaykh.'"[68] In the context of the post-Ṭūsī orthodox narrative of the Occultation, this mention of "the Shaykh" would be read as a reference either to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī or to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, who are both often so named in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*. (Admittedly, in the pre-canonical context of the early Occultation, however, it could mean almost any agent or respected male intermediary for the Imam, including Aḥmad b. Isḥāq.) The historicity of this convenient subordination is unlikely, given that it is not made explicit in any of the early versions of the Ḥājiz reports.

In sum, then, Ḥājiz is an early figure, but with a complex and increasingly overshadowed legacy in the Twelver tradition. He appears to have been an agent who flipped: initially supporting Jaʿfar, then asserting his service of an anonymous Imam. Although Ḥājiz is the most visible representative of the Occultation faction in its earliest stages, his authority was doubted, and had to be legitimated by the earliest Occultation-era rescripts. Perhaps he could never quite outlive the doubt engendered by his switch of allegiance away from Jaʿfar, and by his other more mundane shortcomings.[69] However, he seems to have been an early rejector of Jaʿfar, and he employed many of the mechanisms that were to characterize the mature practices of the Occultation-era envoys.

Upon his death, we are told that Ḥājiz was succeeded in his position as agent by a certain Asadī, based in Rayy.[70] Jassim Hussain argues that this was part of an "administrative reshuffle,"[71] but this vision of the envoyship as a well-oiled machine imposing an orderly reorganization does not follow the early reports' depiction of the chaotic contestations of the early Occultation. Instead it is more likely that the agents of the *nāḥiya* were just consolidating as best they could, and the succession of Asadī implying a shift from Baghdad to Rayy was based on the availability of political supporters of the Occultation faction.

REJECTING JAʿFAR: DEFUNDING THE PRETENDER

In the report I cited above from Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī's *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, Ḥājiz refuses to accept a donor's money and instead sends him

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[68] Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾiḥ* (Qumm: Muʾassasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 1409/1988–89), 2:295–96.

[69] In addition to the report mentioned above, which seems to associate Ḥājiz with Jaʿfar "the Liar," one other report indicates the fallibility of Ḥājiz, showing him forgetting to send on money destined for the Imam. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493–94. This is a slight hint, but may indicate financial mismanagement.

[70] See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488; and Chapter 5.   [71] Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

on to Samarra. Although he entertains the idea of giving the money to Jaʿfar, this donor instead goes to the house of the dead Imam, and is met by a servant who issues a note saying that the money should be paid to Ḥājiz, and not to Jaʿfar.[72] Although the reasons for Ḥājiz's initial rejection of the money are not clarified, the anecdote suggests that insiders to the household of the dead Imam collaborated with Baghdad agents like Ḥājiz, siphoning away funds destined for Jaʿfar.

If the agents were able to divert funds away from Jaʿfar, it certainly would have harmed his claim to the Imamate, depriving him some of the symbolism of Imamate, as well as a source of funds with which to demonstrate his divine favor, and to provide patronage to his followers. Following an encounter with Jaʿfar depicted in a long and complex report in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, a certain Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh continues to gather information about Jaʿfar to ascertain his claims, and is told that Jaʿfar is in humiliating debt and penury, and receiving charity from Ibn Bashshār,[73] apparently an employee of the *naqīb* of the Hāshimites and the Ṭālibids. Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh goes to speak with a group of four of Jaʿfar's agents[74] who laugh and admit that they took money from Jaʿfar. They claim that it was not Jaʿfar's money, but God's money – implying that Jaʿfar was an imposter so it was legitimate to embezzle money collected in his name. They defend themselves by saying that the true Imams were Hādī, Ḥasan, and Jawād, but not this liar Jaʿfar, and that the current Imam is the Mahdī Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan,[75] and they "only take this money so that people see by this that we are against Jaʿfar." After all his researches, Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh and his people all support the Imamate of the child of Ḥasan.[76] Khaṣībī mentions that two of these agents were taking "the money of the villagers," suggesting that they had supporters in the country outside Kufa – also territory that was fruitful in producing supporters of the Nuṣayrīs.[77] These accusations of embezzlement must be taken with a

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72 Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *Thāqib*, 594–95.
73 One wonders if this person is connected to the supporter of Jaʿfar called ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Bashshār, against whom the early Twelver theologian Ibn Qiba directed a polemical tract. Modarressi speculates that this may have been one and the same as the Faṭḥite theologian and supporter of Jaʿfar "the Liar" ʿAlī al-Ṭāḥī/Ṭaḥin. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 146.
74 Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl, Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣāʾigh, and ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Qazwīnī.
75 The child Imam is named here, in contrast to reports that prohibit naming him.
76 Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 293–97.
77 For references to the Iraqi and, in particular, the Kufan and Basran milieu of some of the early Nuṣayrīs, see Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 9, 17, 20; Yaron Friedman, "Ebn Noṣayr," *EIr*; Heinz Halm, "Ḡolāt," *EIr*.

pinch of salt, as they clearly have a polemical aim to undermine Jaʿfar's
Imamate by demonstrating that even his supporters are in bad faith, and
had grubby financial motivations. However, these suggestions of financial
problems are corroborated by other stories in which Jaʿfar is depicted as
being destitute when he is unable to gain the inheritance of Ḥasan.[78]
Jaʿfar's poverty may be a slur, but perhaps not without foundation. The
ideal conception of the Imam was of one whose divine favor was patently
manifest, radiating from his countenance, his bearing, including the glow-
ing richness of his clothes and accoutrements,[79] and a staff of suitably
attired servants and chamberlains often appear in the important function
of intermediaries for the Imam.[80] When the agents defunded Jaʿfar, they
both demonstrated that their commitment lay elsewhere, and they dam-
aged his ability to further press his claim to the Imamate.

REJECTING JAʿFAR: AḤMAD B. ISḤĀQ AND THE QUMMĪ DELEGATION

Jaʿfar's Imamate is repudiated in a key set of reports that revolve around a
delegation sent by the people of Qumm soon after the death of the eleventh
Imam. The stories of the Qummī delegation belong to the broader trope of
seekers for the new Imam.[81] In them, the rejection of Jaʿfar is seen to
depend on a number of criteria, including the test of his (presumably legal
and theological) knowledge;[82] the discovery of his inability to provide the
secret signs of Imamate (perhaps recognized evidentiary miracles);[83] the
assertion of the strict principle of father-to-son succession;[84] and criticism
of his moral character.[85] Moral criticisms were bolstered by details imply-
ing that Jaʿfar had succumbed to the lascivious pleasures of Samarra palace
life; for example, in one report a group of Qummīs seek for the Imam only
to be told about Jaʿfar, "He has gone out on a pleasure cruise

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[78] See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 288–89.

[79] See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:332; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 268–69. See also Rubin, "Prophets," 43.

[80] See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476–79.

[81] In Kulaynī's *Kāfī* the closest approximation of this delegation narrative instead depicts a man from Egypt who goes first to Mecca, then Samarra to find the Imam, and encounters the "*bāb*" who responds with a letter which demonstrates his legitimacy through miracu-lous knowledge. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:523. In Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, he quotes a similar kind of report, this time in which the messenger of a man from Balkh asks Jaʿfar for proofs which he is unable to give, and is therefore rejected. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488–89.

[82] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289–90.   [83] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–76.

[84] Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 81–82.   [85] See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 74.

FIGURE 6 Dancing girls from Samarra palace

(*mutanazzihan*); he has embarked on a boat on the Tigris, drinking with his singers"[86] (Figure 6).[87]

From a sociopolitical standpoint, it is the test of knowledge which is most interesting. While we must recognize these reports as operating within a network of tropes, the test of knowledge which the Qummīs subjected Jaʿfar to may plausibly have been a crucial step in proving him as unsuitable for the Imamate. The test of knowledge is also reported in the

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[86] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 477.
[87] This image is Ernst Herzfeld's watercolor synthesis based on his assembly of fragments of painted plaster discovered in the caliphal palace at Samarra, reproduced from Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, vol. 3, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin: Reimer/Vohsen, 1927), plates I–II.

case of earlier Imams,[88] suggesting that it may indeed have been a common step in the Imami community's acclamation of a new Imam.

We can identify three distinct reports in which the testing of Jaʿfar is associated with people from Qumm, suggesting that a Qummī faction was centrally involved in rejecting Jaʿfar. The key figure in these reports is the agent and scholar Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī, though in one, the leader of the delegation appears as Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī,[89] whose family is, however, clearly associated with Aḥmad b. Isḥāq in the *thiqa* hadith;[90] and in another report the members of the Qummī delegation are not mentioned by name.[91] Khaṣībī's report cited above involves a seeker searching for the rightful Imam:

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madāʾinī said . . . my whimsy (*hawāya*) had been fixed on Jaʿfar, when I came to hear about the messianic Imam (al-Imām al-Mahdī) living at Samarra *(al-ʿAskar)* and that a group of people had seen him, and his commanding and forbidding were issued to them. So, I wrote to Jaʿfar asking him about the Imam and the *waṣī* after him.[92]

The report continues with the intervention of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī:

ʿAbbās b. Ḥaywān and Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣāʾigh said that Jaʿfar wrote to Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī demanding from him [the canonical taxes] that he had been carrying from Qumm to Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī], and more than that. And the people of Qumm gathered with Aḥmad b. Isḥāq and wrote for him a letter of response to [Jaʿfar's] letter including in it questions which they asked him and they said, "Answer these questions (*masāʾil*), just as our forefathers asked your forefathers, which they answered with responses we have kept, and which we take as a source of emulation, which we act in accordance with. Answer them as your earlier fore-fathers answered them, so that we may carry to you the dues which we used to carry to them." And the man [Aḥmad b. Isḥāq] went out until he got to Samarra (al-ʿAskar) and delivered [to Jaʿfar] the letter and he stayed there regarding that matter for a while, asking about the answer to the questions, but Jaʿfar did not answer them, nor the letter at all, ever.[93]

Here, it is not a deficiency in moral character which is seen to exclude Jaʿfar, but rather the fact that his answers to legal-theological questioning

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[88] See, for example, Wardrop, "Lives," 187.
[89] Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī. This is perhaps the brother of ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, who was instrumental in circulating reports of the existence of the child Imam, and was himself associated with Aḥmad b. Isḥāq. It is also possible that the same person is intended, and the name has been corrupted. Both have the *kunya* Abū al-ʿAbbās.
[90] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:329–30. The *thiqa* hadith will be analyzed in detail in this chapter, below.
[91] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–77.   [92] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289–90.   [93] Ibid.

do not correspond with the weight of transmitted lore from the previous generations of Imams: it is a triumph of preserved hadith over living authority. It is notable that epistolary communication is a key vehicle through which these events to play out.[94]

Who was Aḥmad b. Isḥāq? He appears in the *Tārīkh Qumm* as the eleventh Imam's agent for endowments (*awqāf*) in Qumm,[95] which connects him to the financial interests of the Imamate, and ensured that he must have been traveling to and from Qumm regularly prior to the Occultation period. Najāshī gives the following information in his biography of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq:

Aḥmad b. Isḥāq b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Mālik b. al-Aḥwaṣ al-Ashʿarī Abū ʿAlī al-Qummī. He was the delegate (*wāfid*) of the Qummīs. He transmitted from Abū Jaʿfar the Second [al-Jawād] and Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] (AS), and he was the special retainer (*khāṣṣa*) of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) ... [Among his books are]: ... *The Book of the Reasons for Fasting*, a large work, *Questions of the Men to Abū al-Ḥasan the Third [al-Hādī]* (AS) which he collected.[96]

We can glean a number of important facts from this short biography. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq was a member one of the prominent and well-connected families of the Ashʿarī tribe in Qumm.[97] If he met and transmitted from the ninth Imam, who died in 220/835, he may have been born around 200/815 so would have been a venerable age at the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874. It is unlikely that he would have survived Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī,[98] who died in 304/916 or 305/917. Certainly, his list of works gives no indication that he survived into the era of Abū Jaʿfar. The fact that he compiled a collection of responsa from the tenth Imam suggests that he

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[94] A further report in the *Hidāya* seems to refer to this epistolary communication, tantalizingly mentioning "the letter of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq," which arrived "that year at Ḥulwān." Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 280. This may refer to the year of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's death, for he is said to have died at Ḥulwān. See Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 394, though this report also says that Aḥmad b. Isḥāq wrote to Ibn Rawḥ, which seems to contradict the dating of the death that I am suggesting here. All other reports, however, seem to place Aḥmad b. Isḥāq as a pre-Occultation and early Occultation figure, who probably did not survive into the envoyship of Ibn Rawḥ, though the latter may already have been working as an amanuensis for the Imamic institutions at this stage.

[95] Hussain, *Occultation*, 93.

[96] Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91. Ṭūsī has much the same details, with slightly different book titles. *al-Fihrist*, ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmī (N.p.: Muʾassasat al-nashr al-islāmī/nashr al-fiqāha, 1417/1996), 70.

[97] See Newman, *Formative Period*, chapter 4, 50–61, for details of the Ashʿarī family.

[98] In spite of one report, which suggests that he sent a request to Ibn Rawḥ, to go on Ḥajj. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:394.

was firmly associated with this Imam.[99] Neither Ṭūsī nor Najāshī attribute to him any titles which purport to draw on the eleventh or twelfth Imams or to make sense of the Occultation.[100] Thus we can place him firmly among the ranks of the old guard agents mentioned by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī as having survived the eleventh Imam and who affirmed the existence of the twelfth.

AḤMAD B. ISḤĀQ, ʿUTHMĀN B. SAʿĪD, AND ATTESTING TO THE EXISTENCE OF THE HIDDEN IMAM

Like Ḥājiz, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq appears to reflect a memory of old guard agents under the previous Imams who moved to reject Jaʿfar "the Liar." Unlike Ḥājiz, however, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq can be linked clearly with the claim that there existed a child Imam who was the son of Ḥasan. Indeed, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq appears to have played a decisive role in establishing an embryonic consensus for this claim. In a report which I will call the *thiqa* hadith, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq is depicted as establishing ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as the key witness to the Occultation. This hadith is the central piece of evidence cited by early Twelver compilers in seeking to establish the importance of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's role in the early Occultation. Based on its mention of the division of the inheritance (which probably occurred around 262/876) it must depict events that took place after that, but perhaps not by much. As we will see, though, it appears to have undergone a later stage of redactions some years later still. The narrator of this report, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, a key figure among the younger generation of the Occultation faction,[101] is seen here drawing upon the prestige of two pre-Occultation agents, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, to substantiate the Occultation. This hadith is a composite of three separate reports, which I have numbered for clarity:

[PART 1]
Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā transmitted from ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, who said: Shaykh Abū ʿAmr [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī] (RA)[102]

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[99] As well as Najāshī, Ṭūsī does list him among the companions of the eleventh Imam. *Rijāl*, 397.
[100] Ṭūsī's *Fihrist* largely replicates Najāshī's bibliography, with the additional mention of a book on ritual prayer.
[101] See Chapter 5.
[102] The formula *qaddasa Allāh rūḥahu* (QAR), which is usually applied in Ibn Bābūya as the honorific proper to the envoys in particular, is absent in this version, which uses instead

and I gathered at the place of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq hinted (*ghamaza*) that I should ask him about the offspring (*khalaf*).[103]

So, I said to him, "O Abū ʿAmr, I want to ask you about something, regarding which I am not doubtful; for my conviction and my faith is that the earth is never empty of a proof (*ḥujja*) [i.e. a prophet or Imam] except for forty days before the Day of Judgment. When that is the case, then the proof (*ḥujja*) will be removed, and the door of repentance will be closed, and no soul will benefit or gain reward from its belief which did not believe before. For [the Imams] are the sparks among God's creation (AJ), and they are the ones upon whom the resurrection depends. Nonetheless, I would love to be increased in certainty. When Abraham (AS) asked his God (AJ) to show him how the dead are resurrected, He said, 'Do you not believe?' And [Abraham] said, 'Indeed I do, but just to convince my heart.'"

[PART 2]
Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. Isḥāq reported to me from Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī, the tenth Imam] (AS), he said: I questioned him, saying, "Who should I deal with, and from whom should I take, and whose words should I accept?"

[Hādī] said, "Al-ʿAmrī is my reliable one (*thiqa*), and what he delivers to you, he delivers that from me,[104] and what he says to you, he says from me, so listen to him, and obey, for he is the reliable, the trustworthy (*al-thiqa al-maʾmūn*)."

[PART 3]
Abū ʿAlī [Aḥmad b. Isḥāq] reported to me that he asked Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī, the eleventh Imam] (AS) about the same thing, and he said to him, "Al-ʿAmrī and his son are both trusted associates (*thiqa*), and what they deliver to you, they deliver from me, and what they say to you, they say from me. So, listen to them, and obey them, for they are the two reliable, trustworthy ones (*al-thiqatān al-maʾmūnān*)." And this is the speech of two Imams who passed among you.

[PART 1, continued]
[ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī] said: And Abū ʿAmr sank to the ground in prostration and wept, then he said, "Ask your request (*ḥāja*)."

I said to him, "Have you seen the offspring after Abū Muḥammad [the eleventh Imam] (AS)?"

He said, "Yes by God! And his neck was like this!" And he indicated with his hands.

I said to him, "One more [request] remains."

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the more generic *raḥimahu Allāh* (RA), which is applied to many other venerable figures in reports and their *isnād*s.

[103] *Khalaf* means both "successor" and "offspring."

[104] While the verb *addā*, to convey, deliver, discharge, fulfil, pay (Lane, 1:38), is used in the Qurʾān and in the legal literature in collocation with *zakāt* and also other canonical taxes like *kharāj*, here, however, it indicates an action on behalf of the Imam. This presumably refers to gifts and blessings that the Imams are mentioned as giving their followers.

He said to me, "Go ahead."

I said, "And the [child's] name?"

He said, "It is forbidden to you to ask about that, and I do not say this from myself, for it is not for me to make licit or forbid, but rather it is from him [the Imam] (AS). For the state of affairs, as far as the government (*sulṭān*) knows, is that Abū Muḥammad died and did not leave behind a son, and the inheritance was divided, and someone who had no right to it [i.e. Jaʿfar 'the Liar'] took it, and he is the one whose henchmen rove about [in search of the Imam] and no one dares to acknowledge anything to them or to procure anything for them: and if the name comes out, then the pursuit will resume, so have reliance in God and keep away from that."[105]

This report is compiled from a central framing narrative (Part 1) interrupted by two earlier Imamic statements (Parts 2 and 3) which provide further context for the protagonist of the central narrative, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, but also his son, who is absent from the framing narrative. The narrator, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, casts Aḥmad b. Isḥāq in a supporting role in the framing narrative, but also uses Aḥmad as his authority for the statements of the earlier Imams in Parts 2 and 3. In Part 1, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq appears to know the secret, and prompts ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar to question ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd about the existence of the child Imam. In Part 2, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq reports that before the Occultation, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was described by the tenth Imam as "the reliable, the trustworthy." Part 3 reports that the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar, was also designated in the same way by the eleventh Imam.

The purpose of this composite report, then, is to assert the existence of the hidden Imam, but also to underscore the legitimacy of the men who bore witness to his existence. The younger generation narrator, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, saw fit to underscore the legitimacy of the ʿAmrīs in the midst of giving witness to the hidden Imam. Parts 2 and 3 do not appear to be parenthetical statements which were part of the original report – they break the flow of the framing narrative too violently – and so we can conclude that they were added at a later stage. The insertion of Part 3 represents the more intrusive act of redaction, for the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar, is entirely absent from the framing narrative, and therefore apparently irrelevant. By adding a statement legitimizing him as an Imamic representative, the narrator implies the continuity of the authority of the two ʿAmrīs both before and after the Occultation. It is notable that another, perhaps earlier, version of this hadith does not include Abū

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[105] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:329–30.

Jaʿfar as being appointed by the Imam,[106] again suggesting that Abū Jaʿfar was later inserted into this composite tradition by Ḥimyarī to underscore Abū Jaʿfar's leadership claims which can be dated as somewhat later than the original crisis of succession.[107] The later additions to the *thiqa* hadith imply two things: that the existence of the hidden Imam continued to be doubted and so the veracity of its witnesses needed to be underscored; and that the claims of the ʿAmrīs to be Imamic intermediaries required substantiation, especially the claim of the son, Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, who plays no part in witnessing to the hidden Imam in the framing narrative, but gains prestige by association. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's involvement is noteworthy, whether he really was involved in pressing the claims of the ʿAmrīs, or whether the association was effected retrospectively.

AḤMAD B. ISḤĀQ'S DEATH AND THE RUPTURE

There are several accounts that mention Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's death at Ḥulwān (by the foot of the Zagros mountains in Iran) on his way back to Qumm from Ḥajj or a visit to the eleventh Imam's house in Samarra.[108] Though a date is not mentioned, their tone suggests that his death was something of a watershed for the early Occultation faction. One account mentions that Kāfūr the eunuch,[109] the servant of Ḥasan, washed the corpse of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq after his death at Ḥulwān, saying that he had, "the noblest position of all of you with regard to your Lord [the Imam]." After this, Kāfūr miraculously disappears.[110] This report suggests that some people saw Aḥmad b. Isḥāq as the principal representative of the Imam in his time.[111] In another report in Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī's *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq is mentioned immediately after the name and birth date of the twelfth Imam and the death date of the eleventh Imam. This is the position in which, according to the structure of the other chapters of *Dalāʾil al-*

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[106] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 220.

[107] As we shall see in Chapter 5, there were certainly agents of the eleventh Imam who did not recognize that Abū Jaʿfar had ever been appointed by the Imam.

[108] For example, Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 503.

[109] See Chapter 3 for the prominence of eunuch servants as intermediaries for the hidden Imam.

[110] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 464–65.

[111] Admittedly, this account is miraculous and hagiographical. It follows a certain type: the posthumous recognition by the Imam of his favored followers, including the *nuwwāb* hadith in which Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Qummī al-Ḥimyarī is provided with funerary items, demonstrating the Imam's favor and also the miraculous foreknowledge of his death. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 478–79.

imāma, we would expect to find mention of the Imam's major spokes-person, *bāb* (or *bawwāb* as the printed edition of Ibn Rustum's work idiosyncratically puts it).[112] While Ibn Rustum does not explicitly call Aḥmad b. Isḥāq a *bāb*, but instead, an agent, this positioning does imply that Aḥmad b. Isḥāq had the role of a quasi-*bāb* (or envoy), suggesting again the slippage between the two:

And Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī al-Ashʿarī (RAA), the truth-telling Shaykh, was the agent (*wakīl*) of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī (AS), and when Abū Muḥammad (AS) passed to the bounty (*karāma*) of God (AJ), he continued in his agentship (*aqāma ʿalā wikālatihi*) with our Master (*mawlā*) the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) (SAA), and the rescripts (*tawqīʿāt*) were issued to him and the money was sent to him from all the other regions (*nawāḥī*) in which the followers of our Master were, and he passed [that money] on (*tusallim*), until a time when he sought permission to go to Qumm, and the permission to go was issued, and it was mentioned that he never reached Qumm, but that he sickened and died on the road. He sickened at Ḥulwān, and died, and was buried there (RAA). And our Master (SAA) lived at Samarra for a while after the death of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Ashʿarī, then he disap-peared (*ghāba*) according to what is transmitted regarding the Occultation from the reports (*akhbār*) from the Lords (AS) [i.e. the earlier Imams] although he has been witnessed (*mushāhad*) in high, eminent, noble locations and significant places and the reports have indicated the reliability of the witness borne to him (AS).[113]

This report has no *isnād*, and so represents the opinion of the author, based on reports whose genealogy we have no way of tracing. However, it clearly represents the preservation of an alternative vision of early Occultation authority, apparently preserved in Nuṣayrī or related circles, for Ibn Nuṣayr is also listed as an earlier *bāb*,[114] and therefore comparable to the kind of information preserved in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*. Thus, while it affirms the Occultation, it contradicts the classical narrative of the canon-ical four envoys by suggesting a preeminent position for Aḥmad b. Isḥāq. This report leaves no Occultation-era role for ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, who is

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[112] *Bāb* means "gate," while *bawwāb* means "doorman." It is possible that these words were used synonymously in this context. However, it is also likely that this emendation was made by a later copyist or redactor who wanted to remain faithful to the text of Ibn Rustum, but felt uncomfortable with the *ghulāt* associations of the term *bāb*. However, in context, the usage of the word is clearly the same.

[113] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 503.

[114] Likewise, others *bāb*s who appear in Nuṣayrī canons like ʿUmar b. al-Furāt for the ninth Imam, and Salmān al-Fārīsī for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib are included among Ibn Rustum's mentioned "*bawwāb*s." If Ibn Rustum had felt uncomfortable with the concept of *bāb*, then he would probably not have included Ibn Nuṣayr's name among these figures. See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 9n14.

represented in *Dalāʾil al-imāma* as the *bāb*[115] of the tenth and eleventh Imams.[116] Instead, it is Aḥmad b. Isḥāq who appears as the archetypal intermediary of the hidden Imam, after whose death a rupture is precipitated. Indeed, this rupture is presented as the first moment of a complete Occultation in which the Imam is no longer accessible through an intermediary. In this way it compares strikingly to Abū Sahl's indication of the occurrence of this second phase of Occultation as following the death of the last man from the old guard agents. From that moment onward, the *Dalāʾil* report suggests, Samarra lost its place as the seat of the Imamic institutions, and there were no longer any direct communications with the hidden Imam, but rather he is witnessed spontaneously "in high, eminent, noble locations and significant places."[117]

SUMMING UP AḤMAD B. ISḤĀQ'S ROLE

It is hard to sum up the role of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, who appears in different roles in various reports, with various terms being used to describe his role. In the *thiqa* hadith, he is depicted collaborating with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd to assert the existence of the hidden Imam. In another account, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq himself attests directly to the existence of the hidden Imam on the basis of a purported correspondence he had with the Imam.[118] In another report, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq himself is believed to be the Gate (*bāb*) of the hidden Imam, displacing the canonical envoys from this role.[119] Ibn Rustum calls Aḥmad b. Isḥāq an agent, and the biographical dictionaries mention him as an elite retainer (*khāṣṣa*, pl. *khawāṣṣ*) of the eleventh Imam and the leader and delegate of the Qummīs, and provide a list of works he authored.[120] He is, then, something of a hybrid figure: both scholar and tax-collector; Qummī, but representing the hidden Imam from Samarra. The varying roles assigned to Aḥmad b.

[115] Again, Ibn Rustum uses the word *bawwāb* (doorman), where one would expect to see *bāb* (Gate).
[116] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 411, 425.
[117] This idea of the second phase of the Occultation being one in which the Imam is only seen spontaneously, in different places, is a pre-canonical formulation, which leaves no clear place for the envoys, though it compares with other early accounts of spontaneous visions of the Imam. This framework probably originated from roughly the same time as the *Tanbīh*, at the turn of the fourth/tenth century, though in the *Dalāʾil* it has been fit into the overall *bābī* framework of that work. For the ongoing afterlife of the concept that the Imam can be contacted in such ways, see Ghaemmaghami, *Encounters*.
[118] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 433–34.   [119] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 503.
[120] Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 225; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 70.

Isḥāq suggest a retrospective elaboration of his legacy which was received in different ways at different times and places. However, the fact that his personality was able to attract such elaborations also implies that he was both highly respected, and intimately associated with claims that a hidden child Imam existed. The importance of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's role in defining the Occultation faction in its earliest years is also hinted at in the way his death is narrated as a turning point. All of this suggests that he may, indeed, have been a crucial figure before the canonical position of the ʿAmrīs as envoys was crystallized. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq is representative of different aspects that were crucial in the genesis of the new Twelver synthesis: the alliance between Iraqi and Qummī interests, and his role as both a fiscal agent embedded in institutional networks of the Imamate, and as an epistemic authority, transmitting the preserved lore of past Imams. His access to overlapping spheres of influence might explain something of his pivotal historical role.

RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND THE THEATER OF PERSUASION

As we have seen, the earliest reports detailing the activities of the agents of the Occultation faction concentrate on two aspects: the assertion of the legitimacy of the Imam and his agents; and the collection of funds. In both aspects, the agents met resistance. Doubt regarding legitimacy is presented as having been addressed through the issuing of rescripts and displays of Imamic pomp and miracles. Resistance to the collection of funds also had to be met by similar mechanisms of persuasion. However, in addition to resistance, there was an active need felt by members of the community to continue paying the canonical alms taxes. This need for ritual continuity is clear from the Qummī delegation reports. Thus, in order to understand the early challenges of agents trying to maintain the institutions of Imamate in the absence of an Imam, we should understand them as navigating between the converse pressures of the desire to send money to the Imam, and the doubt over his identity or existence.

Some members of the community clearly doubted the agents' right even to hold onto the funds they had collected in the name of the eleventh Imam, not to mention attempts to continue collecting further funds in the name of an anonymous Imam. One report cited by Kulaynī clearly shows this resistance.[121] It dramatizes how the doubt of a community delegate is

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[121] In one report in Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, we are given an intimation of these difficulties: "Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh said: Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr and Abū Ṣaddām and a group of others (*jamāʿa*) debated (*takallamū*) after the death of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] about what was in the

dispelled by the agents of the Occultation faction, including Aḥmad b. Isḥāq. When the delegate arrives in Baghdad, the Imamic operatives orchestrate his transfer of the money he is carrying, and, in recompense, the *nāḥiya* covers his living expenses. The delegate is then instructed by note to travel on to Samarra at a specific time. There, he is first sent notes arranging the specific time he is to arrive, before being invited to the Imam's house. When he arrives, he is met by a servant, recognized, ushered further into the house, and spoken to from behind a curtain,[122] a typical mechanism for preserving the charismatic aura of a powerful man, but also a potent symbol of the hidden-ness of the Imam in this era. This narrative seems to suggest the implementation of a kind of theater of persuasion in which the agents and their collaborators inside the Imamic household demonstrated the legitimacy of the archetypal Imamic establishment by employing the recognized language of Imamic ceremony and symbolism, echoing the pomp of the caliph and the houses of other powerful men.

THREATENING THE ṬĀLIBIDS

In addition to the extraction of resources, we see one instance in which the early Occultation faction employs the withholding of resources as a coercive tool to persuade the recalcitrant. The report in Kulaynī's *Kāfī* gives an intriguing window into the political relations between the *nāḥiya* and the powerful ʿAlid families. Notably the reporter is a *mawlā* whose patron was the daughter of the ninth Imam, therefore a cousin once-removed of the eleventh Imam.

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad transmitted from al-Faḍl al-Khazzāz al-Madāʾinī *mawlā* of Khadīja bt. Muḥammad Abū Jaʿfar:[123] A group of the people of Medina from among the Ṭālibids testified to the truth. Stipends (*waẓāʾif*) used to come to them at an appointed time (*fī waqt maʿlūm*). When Abū Muḥammad died a group of them

hands of the agents and they wanted an investigation (*al-faḥṣ*)." Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:517–18. Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* carries the same report, but with an extra detail which suggests the resistance was not just due to what remained in the hands of the agents, but also what they continued to collect: "Abū al-Qāsim Saʿd b. Abī Khalaf [=Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī] said: Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naṣr and Abū Ṣaddām and a group of others (*jamāʿa*) spoke with me after the passing of Abū al-Ḥasan [*sic*: This hadith clearly refers to the time of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and so should read Abū Muḥammad (al-ʿAskarī), instead of Abū al-Ḥasan (al-Hādī)] about what was in the hands of the agents, and they were seeking additional dues [reading here *qabaḍ* instead of *qabṭ*]." Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277.

122 See Figure 2 in Chapter 2.
123 Given the access this man has to the inner circles of the family of the Prophet, he may be the client of the daughter of the son of Imam ʿAlī al-Hādī.

recanted from attesting to the child, and so the stipends came to whoever among them attested to the child, but [the money] was cut off from the others.[124]

This suggests that in spite of the perplexity, the *nāḥiya* had the connections to ensure real means of coercion to persuade the elite Ṭālibid families to support the Occultation faction. It suggests that even at this early stage there was some connection between the insider agents and their contacts among the caliphal authorities and the *naqīb*s who were appointed by the authorities to distribute stipends to the members of the family of the Prophet,[125] many of whom would have Shiʿi leanings.[126]

BETWEEN SAMARRA, BAGHDAD, AND QUMM: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE OCCULTATION FACTION

When considering the geographical scope of the narratives relating to the earliest phase of the Occultation, three locations regularly occur as pivotal: Samarra, where the anonymous Imam initially was claimed to reside; Baghdad, the base of the most powerful agents (and soon to become the permanent residence of the canonical envoys); and Qumm, a donor community which early on appears to have formed an alliance with the Occultation faction agents based in Baghdad. Notably absent are prominent Kufans (who had, since the early days of the Shiʿa, formed the backbone of the Imams' followers).[127]

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[124] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518–19.

[125] See John Donahue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334 H./945 to 403 H./1012: Shaping Institutions for the Future* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 313; and also Teresa Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids: The First Family of Islam, 750–1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[126] If we recall the maneuvers of Jaʿfar "the Liar" we also note that he was depicted as petitioning the caliph regarding his inheritance and succession to the position of the eleventh Imam, and he was also depicted as visiting the *naqīb* in Samarra, the official in charge of distributing stipends to the Ṭālibids. This report raises the possibility that the *naqīb* and perhaps therefore also some actors among the caliphal authorities were tacitly in support of the agents who came to form the Occultation faction. If this were true, it would be an early attestation to political activities of the office of *naqīb*. For the origins of the *niqāba*, see Kazuo Morimoto, "A Preliminary Study on the Diffusion of the *Niqāba al-Ṭālibiyīn*: Towards an Understanding of the Early Dispersal of *Sayyid*s," in *The Influence of Human Mobility in Muslim Societies*, ed. Hidemitsu Kuroki (London; New York: Kegan Paul, 2003), 3–42.

[127] Traditions regarding Kufan support for the hidden Imam and the *nāḥiya* at this time are distinctly thin on the ground. Ibn Bābūya scarcely mentions Kufa in his chapter on those who saw the Imam. In spite of the *nisba* of the transmitter, Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list of *wakīl*s and laymen who saw the hidden Imam is distinctly short on Kufans. (See Table 3 and Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442–43.) If we compare our sources for references to Kufa,

While Qumm had been rising in prominence as a location for the production of Imami Shiʿi knowledge before this time,[128] it seems that the Occultation was a moment in which the Kufans dropped out of the scene, leaving Qummīs and Baghdadis as the central axis along which the new Twelver Shiʿi synthesis was developed. Meanwhile, the Kufans seem to have been attracted to alternative movements arising at the same time, including the new Ismailism,[129] and those *ghulāt* groups which became feeders of the embryonic Isḥāqiyya and Nuṣayrism.[130] Crucially, also, Jaʿfar "the Liar" seems initially to have had strong support among the Kufans, both the Fatḥiyya and the more unorthodox followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim.[131]

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neither Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya, nor Ṭūsī mention anything to speak of regarding the activities of Kufans in the early Occultation period. Kulaynī carries a single report which seems to cast aspersions on Kufa as a place where excessive alcohol consumption takes place. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:523.

[128] For the role of the "Shiʿi Haven" of Qumm, especially the prominent Ashʿarī tribe, see Newman, *Formative Period*, 38–42; Andreas Drechsler, *Geschichte der Stadt Qom im Mittelalter (650–1350)* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1999).

[129] The activities of the Ismaili mission first began to gain a following in Khūzistān, but soon also in and around Kufa, where Ḥamdān b. Qarmaṭ converted and engaged in the *daʿwa* around 264/877–78, just when the first doctrines of the Occultation faction would have been gaining traction. See Wilferd Madelung, "Ḥamdān Karmaṭ," *EI2*; David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾān: Early Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 10–17. One compelling narrative of a Kufan Imami's conversion to the Ismaili *daʿwa* provides us with a graphic description of the success of Ismaili claims during the perplexity of the early Occultation-era Imamis: al-Qāḍī Nuʿmān's *Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa* includes a narrative of the conversion to the Ismaili *daʿwa* of the head of the early Fatimid *daʿwa* in Yemen, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Faraḥ b. Ḥawshab b. Zādān al-Kūfī, known as al-Manṣūr or Manṣūr al-Yaman. In it, this Kufan Imami appears discouraged by his situation, and the doctrines regarding the awaited Mahdi of the Occultation faction which the narrator glosses as "amazing nonsense." He meets, and is converted by, an anonymous shaykh, who turns out to be the Ismaili Imam. Qāḍī Nuʿmān, *Founding*, 21–23.

[130] Asatryan has an important discussion of the rise of the *bāb*s during the early Occultation period. *Controversies*, 111–21. See Chapter 5 for more detail. Early Nuṣayrīs appear to have been associated with the Occultation faction. As is seen throughout this book, Khaṣībī is a major early transmitter of traditions about the hidden Imam and his agents. Notably, he carries significantly more references to Kufans than other early sources, which is unsurprising, given that we know that he had some supporters in Kufa. Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 9, 17, 20. Nonetheless, the Qummī connection is crucial also for Khaṣībī, furnishing many of his major sources. While many of the Kufans he mentioned supported Jaʿfar "the Liar," Khaṣībī also refers to supporters of the hidden Imam hailing from Kufa and the Sawād. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 246–48, 255–56, 394–95.

[131] See above and Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

Most of the early reports locate the Imam in Samarra, where his father had lived and died. It is true, a few reports place the hidden Imam in the historical seat of the Imams in the Ḥijāz, in particular Medina and its environs. These reports, however, do not tend to mention the agents or the collection of Imamic dues, but instead revolve around charismatic encounters managed by figures like Badr the eunuch.[132] In the reports narrating doubts about Ḥājiz's authority, a relationship is suggested between Ḥājiz, based in Baghdad, and the Imam, based in Samarra. This geographical relationship is made explicit in a report which exists in the twelfth-century *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib* by Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī.[133] Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, meanwhile, is depicted as representing the Imam in Samarra. As we have seen, in the *Dalāʾil*, the disappearance of the Imam from Samarra is linked with the death of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq: "Our Master (SAA) lived at Samarra for a while after the death of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Ashʿarī, then he disappeared (*ghāba*) . . . although he has been witnessed (*mushāhad*) in high, eminent, noble locations and significant places, and the reports have indicated the reliability of the witness borne to him."[134] This report clearly suggests a periodization: first it was claimed that the Imam was in Samarra represented by the old guard agents. Then, after the old guard agents died out, the location of the Imam was not known, but sightings continued in various locations: these sightings correspond to the many reports we have regarding spotting the Imam on Ḥajj.[135] Eventually, after the rupture caused by the deaths of the old guard, Baghdad is reestablished as the location of the Imamic establishment represented by the envoys. This final stage is clearly mentioned in another report, which I will call the *nuwwāb* hadith, which first narrates the adventures of the Qummī delegation searching for the true Imam in Samarra, and then finishes by explaining the establishment of Baghdad as the location of the agents of the Imam going forward:

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[132] See Chapter 3. On the whole, the reports that give details of operations in Samarra and Baghdad are quite different from the archetypal, mythic reports of the Imam appearing in Mecca, in which there is a great continuity between the pre-*ghayba* and *ghayba*-era reports. The Meccan reports are filled with notes of mystery and miracle, and the functionaries of the Imam themselves appear as miraculous and mysterious, rather than being named historical characters known to their audience. See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 443–44. Also, for the Wāqifī precedents for the Occultation of the Qāʾim taking place in or near Medina, especially "Ṭayba," see Ghaemmaghami, *Encounters*, 35–36, 56–61.

[133] Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *Thāqib*, 594–95.   [134] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 503.

[135] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 443–44, 444–45, 445–53, 470–72.

And as soon as Abū al-ʿAbbās [a member of the Qummī delegation] reached ʿAqabat Hamadān, he died (RAA). After that we brought our money to Baghdad to the deputies (*nuwwāb*) appointed for it and from whom the rescripts (*tawqīʿāt*) issued.[136]

This parallels the pattern in the *Dalāʾil*, in which the death of an old guard agent (in that case Aḥmad b. Isḥāq at Ḥulwān) precipitates the relocation of the Imamic establishment away from Samarra. The idea that there was a clean relocation from a somewhat accessible Imam in Samarra to a more indirect link provided by the deputies in Baghdad probably reflects a later back-projection of de facto developments: the envoys were by then operating in Baghdad, and this report answers the question, Why, if the Imam had been in Samarra, did the community start bringing their funds to agents in Baghdad? This, then, clearly implies a break between the earliest phase of the Occultation and the establishment of the envoys in Baghdad. It is noteworthy that this report coins what later became an official designation for the envoys as "deputies" (*nuwwāb*) for the hidden Imam.[137] However, this report provides no mention of the ʿAmrīs, or any other named agents, again giving us the picture of a transitional stage in the doctrine of the representatives of the hidden Imam: the shadowy, ambiguous figures of the *nāḥiya*, rather than the canonized figures of the four envoys.

By contrast, Abū Jaʿfar is barely associated with Samarra: In Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, there is a single report in which Abū Jaʿfar is mentioned in connection with Samarra. In this report, Abū Jaʿfar is described as sending money to "the *wakīl*" in Samarra, in the hands of other men appointed to the task.[138] This report also comes within a series of narratives reported by a certain Ibn Abī Ḥulays, who also mentions a figure known as Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad "the *Wakīl*."

In a report in the *Dalāʾil* to be analyzed in more detail in Chapter 5, Abū Jaʿfar in Baghdad is depicted as the practical focus of canonical tax-collection, but Samarra is still important as part of the evidentiary structures that legitimate the *nāḥiya*, which still traces its genealogy to the location of the house of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. The same dynamic also appears in one of the reports about Ḥājiz mentioned in Chapter 3, in which Ḥājiz in Baghdad refuses to accept money and sends the donor to

[136] Ibid., 478–79.
[137] The usage of the word "deputy"/"representative" (*nāʾib*, pl. *nuwwāb*) here is perhaps the first instance of language which was to become the doctrinal norm in describing structures of authority under the Occultation. See, for example, Sachedina, *Messianism*, 100–101.
[138] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

Samarra, where the donor is issued with a note from the *nāḥiya* which instructs him to then go back to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz.[139] These hints suggest that agents in Baghdad might have continued to rely on the symbolic authority conferred by association with the Imams' house in Samarra, while practically conducting their fiscal operations in Baghdad, which was to become the seat of the envoyship. The rupture following the deaths of Samarra-based old guard agents like Ḥājiz and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, then, was followed by a reconsolidation associated with the envoys in Baghdad, a shift which, incidentally, echoes a broader shift in the location of power, as the caliph Muʿtaḍid moved his capital back to Baghdad in 279/892, after more than half a century with Samarra as capital.[140]

CONCLUSION: THE OLD GUARD AGENTS DURING THE ERA OF
PERPLEXITY

During the first couple of decades after 260/874 we can see the initial seeds of the Twelver synthesis. While it is possible that much of our evidence for this period was produced in the mill of later elaboration, there are a number of central themes that recur frequently enough to suggest that they are likely to represent historical dynamics. The first key insight that we have gained in this chapter is the rupture between an early generation of old guard agents who had served al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and a later generation who had had little or no direct contact with Ḥasan. By tracking this generational division, we are able to identify a number of key figures in the older generation, who were active in Samarra, Baghdad, and Qumm in the earliest period of the Occultation, and who are prominent in the earliest reports in which the Imamate of the child Imam is articulated. Among these old guard agents we can identify two key figures: first, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, who appears as a Qummī delegate or regional agent with one foot in Samarra and manifested the autonomous epistemic authority of the scholar, while acting as gatekeeper to the knowledge necessary to recognizing the Imam, and is seen to curate the legacy of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī as

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[139] Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *Thāqib*, 594–96. This also echoes the interactions that occur between Abū Jaʿfar in Baghdad, and an unnamed agent in Samarra.

[140] Alistair Northedge, "Sāmarrāʾ," *EI2*. This shift also coincides with the probable dates of Jaʿfar "the Liar"'s death. As we will see in the following chapters, the Occultation faction was rather successful in manipulating its contacts within the ʿAbbasid court to leverage their influence within the Shiʿi community, in contrast to Jaʿfar, who, as we have seen, failed to win caliphal support for his Imamate. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:505–6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475–76.

eyewitness to the Imam. Secondly, Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʾ appears as an agent endowed with the sacral-fiscal authority of the institutions of the Imamate, an authority underscored by a rescript from a hidden Imam. The deaths of both Aḥmad b. Isḥāq and Ḥājiz were remembered as important turning points in the early community, and either of these are candidates for being Abū Sahl's "last man standing" from among the agents of the old guard whose deaths precipitated the rupture in mediation and the rise of the envoys.

While the crisis in the household of the Imam unfolded, continuity was demanded by members of the community who still relied upon the purificatory, salvific function of the Imam as performed through sacred economy of alms tax donation. The Qummīs and other people from the Jibāl of Iran were actively seeking an Imam to whom to bring their canonical taxes. These attempts were in some cases inconclusive, but they generated a literary resource of reports that ultimately pointed to the existence of an Imam who was initially believed to reside in Samarra. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq's name has been passed down as a key figure in the formulation of these reports; and as a delegate or regional agent who regularly traveled between Qumm and Iraq, he may indeed have been pivotal in establishing an alliance between the Qummīs, who wanted to continue as they were accustomed, and the agents based in Samarra and Baghdad, who wanted to maintain the continuity of the central institutions of the Imamate upon which their belief, their prestige, and their place in society depended. Ultimately this Qummī-Baghdadi alliance became the axis upon which the new Twelver synthesis was developed. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, as we shall see, is depicted as associating with the elder ʿAmrī in the *thiqa* hadith, but not directly with the younger. In the *Dalāʾil*, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq appears in the role of the agent, after whose death the Imam goes into full Occultation, suggesting that he may have been the single man to survive the old guard mentioned by Abū Sahl.

As depicted in narrative reports, Ḥājiz is the dominant agent among a number of named agents from the earliest period. He seems to have been initially associated with Jaʿfar "the Liar," but soon repudiated Jaʿfar, to collect money on behalf of a hidden Imam – and probably declared for the hidden child Imam at some stage before his death, though it is likely that initially he may have collected in the name of the eleventh Imam, or another undefined hidden twelfth Imam. Ḥājiz usually appears to be acting autonomously, though one later version aims to subordinate Ḥājiz to Abū Jaʿfar, apparently as an effort to bring the early archetype of Ḥājiz's authority under the aegis of the four-envoy theory. The canonical envoys

are not explicitly linked to Ḥājiz elsewhere, but they do adopt similar dynamics of agentship to Ḥājiz, operating the fiscal administration from Baghdad while retaining contact with allies in Samarra in the household of the Imams, who functioned primarily as an evidentiary mechanism to prove the legitimacy of this Baghdad-based *nāḥiya*. Likewise, Ḥājiz is not presented as having any relationship with Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, and though they both appear in the later mosaic compilations of accounts affirming the existence of the hidden Imam, it is very possible that they represent different factions or different stages in the transition toward the firm acceptance of an orthodox position on the hidden Imam.

The period of the old guard agents is not identical to the period of the envoys, though it laid the ground for it in many ways. In particular, this earliest phase of the Occultation established the collective authority of the "*nāḥiya*," which stood for the continuity of Imamic institutions operated by the agents, while obfuscating the exact identity of the mediating authority. The vocabulary of the "*nāḥiya*," and the model of secretive and ambiguous authority that it referred to, was maintained even in the following period in which the leadership of clearly identified supreme envoys became more widely accepted in the community.

5

The Creation of an Envoy

The Rise of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī

While, in the first phase of the Occultation, no consensus existed regarding doctrine or leadership, there arose from this chaotic environment a man who asserted a new paradigm of authority for the Imami community: the paradigm of the envoy (*safīr*). While this paradigm was only fully established after his death, we can see all the basic elements meeting in the activities of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī. By the time Ibn Bābūya was writing in the late fourth/tenth century, there were a cluster of reports available to him, which depicted Abū Jaʿfar as the unique designated spokesman for the hidden Imam, collecting funds in his name, issuing his statements and edicts, and implementing a quasi-Imamic mechanism of designation (*naṣṣ* and *waṣiyya*) for his own envoy-successor.[1] While this image had certainly undergone some editing by Ibn Bābūya and his informants, it is clear that these reports were based on complex experiences which bespeak varied interpretations of Abū Jaʿfar's role including contemporary support and opposition. Editors and compilers of these accounts did not, however, go so far as to fully suppress the evidence for political contestation of doctrine and personnel visible in Abū Jaʿfar's quarrels with other well-positioned agents. This contestation had happened, and needed to be addressed.

Before Abū Jaʿfar's rise, we cannot speak of "envoys" in the canonical Twelver model, because the old guard agents do not appear to have institutionalized a single, clearly identifiable Imamic intermediary. In this chapter, we will assess the rise and the roles of Abū Jaʿfar in this function. His activities can be understood as occupying several overlapping fields:

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[1] In contrast to his father, for whom no unambiguous reports about Occultation-era activities survive.

political legitimacy and representation; institutional-fiscal management; and doctrine and legal-theological guidance. In order to understand the framework within which these elements were contested, we will start with a dissection of the political alliances and rivalries which characterized Abū Jaʿfar's rise, and which have left their mark on practically all the reports which narrate the period of his tenure.

The rise of Abū Jaʿfar accompanied the consolidation of the embryonic elements of the Occultation doctrine. There was by no means a full consensus, but the idea had enough momentum that it began to serve as a compromise doctrine to start uniting the Imamis who rejected al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's brother, Jaʿfar "the Liar." Even within the pro-Occultation faction, however, Abū Jaʿfar had to meet opposition both from skeptical old guard agents and from rival charismatic *bāb*s. All of this took place in a context in which, in addition to the threat from Jaʿfar, we must also assume that the crisis in the Imamiyya was driving conversion to other sects like the newly visible Ismailis.[2]

DATING THE RISE OF ABŪ JAʿFAR: RETURNING TO ABŪ SAHL'S *TANBĪH*

As I laid out in Chapter 4, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Tanbīh* is a key witness which provides us with a kind of chronology for the development of major players in the Occultation faction. It allowed us to establish a clear sense of a younger and an older generation of agents, something that is confirmed by other sources in illuminating ways. Unfortunately, Abū Sahl names no names in the *Tanbīh*. Let us now return to a more detailed analysis of this text to see how it might relate to the life of Abū Jaʿfar:

Al-Ḥasan (AS) left behind a group of his trusted companions (*thiqāt*) among those who transmitted from the rulings about licit and illicit (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*), and gave [him] the letters and the money of the Shiʿa and issued their answers. They were in a position of cautious concealment (*bi-mawdiʿ min al-sitr*) and of uprightness (*ʿadāla*) due to [the Imam's] declaring them to be upright (*taʿdīlihi iyyāhum*) during his lifetime.

2 See, for example, the report in which the hidden Imam was written to in the handwriting of a great *faqīh*, but the Imam did not respond, and it turned out afterward that the man had become a Qarmaṭī, thus demonstrating the Imam's miraculous intuition of his former follower's apostasy. Mufīd, *Irshād*, 2:359. This kind of report is rather rare, but it demonstrates both that conversion took place (as one would expect in such a time of perplexity) and the *nāḥiya* is depicted as responding to the problem of converts. For the early phase of the rise of the Ismailis, see Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾān*, 1–35.

And when [the Imam] passed away, they came to a unanimous consensus that he had left behind as successor a child who is the Imam, and they ordered the people not to ask about his name and to hide that from his enemies, while the government (*sulṭān*) was searching for him as hard as it could, and appointed [watchers] over his houses and those who were pregnant among the concubines of al-Ḥasan (AS).

Then, the letters of his son, the successor after him, were issued to the Shiʿa with commanding and forbidding from the hands of the men of his father, the trusted companions (*thiqāt*), for more than twenty years, then the writing was cut off, and most of the men of al-Ḥasan (AS) who had attested to the leadership (*amr*) of the Imam after him had passed away. However, one man survived, about whose uprightness (*ʿadāla*) and reliability (*thiqa*) the Shiʿa united in consensus (*ajmaʿū*). And he ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*) and not to broadcast anything about the condition of the Imam. Then the correspondence [with the Imam] was cut off, and the proof (*thabāt*) of the physical presence of the Imam was established by the proofs (*dalīl*) that I have mentioned.[3]

Left to itself, this quote could be understood to suggest that Abū Jaʿfar was the one man left surviving from the old guard, and this is how Arjomand interprets it, saying that, "Abu Sahl affirms the authority of Ibn al-ʿAmrī as the sole surviving member of the inner circle of the eleventh Imam."[4] However, if we read the quote above alongside an earlier statement in the *Tanbīh*, we see that Abū Sahl refers to this last surviving man from among the old guard, and emphasizes that he, too, was deceased by the time of writing, and therefore could not be identified with Abū Jaʿfar, who died a more than a decade after Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*:

And among the Shiʿa who were in the service of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (AS) there was a certain person, one of his trusted associates (*thiqāt*), who mentioned that the connection (*sabab*) between himself and the son of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (AS) was unbroken (*muttaṣil*). **And he [the Imam] used to issue some of his letters and his commands and his forbiddings by [that man's] hand to his Shiʿa until [the man] died. Then [the man] appointed as successor a hidden man from the Shiʿa who took up his position in the leadership (*amr*) of this [community]** *(wa awṣā ilā rajulin min al-shīʿa mastūrin fa-qāma maqāmahu fī hādhā al-amr).*[5]

How can we reconcile Abū Sahl's two references to the embryonic office of envoy with the evidence of more detailed narrative accounts? Abū Sahl makes it clear that the member of the old guard who had been largely responsible for issuing Imamic letters was, by the time of the *Tanbīh*'s composition, certainly dead. It was this old guard agent's death which

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[3] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 92–93.   [4] Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 9.
[5] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88 (emphasis added).

surely must have terminated the issuance of letters. It is possible, then, that Abū Sahl simply did not recognize Abū Jaʿfar as envoy.[6] If, however, Abū Jaʿfar *is* reflected anywhere in Abū Sahl's statements, it would seem to be the figure of the mysterious "hidden man from the Shiʿa" who was designated as the last surviving man's successor, and whose life dates therefore overlap with Abū Jaʿfar. However, as we will see below, the only explicit narrative which seems to fit this idea (in Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī's *Dalāʾil*) depicts Abū Jaʿfar as a contact person for the hidden Imam's hidden agent, rather than occupying this role himself.

PLACING ABŪ JAʿFAR

Abū Jaʿfar was certainly depicted as distinct from the old guard by some of his peers. Thus, his rise is frequently associated with rupture, as the old guard agents died out by around 280/894, threatening their tenuous achievements in maintaining continuity in the Imamic institutions. Reports are elliptical when dealing with this traumatic rupture but there are two major issues that accompanied it. The first is the issue of leadership: the community did not know who was representing the Imam, whether agent or *bāb* or someone else. The second is the associated issue of doctrine and the nature of guidance in the Occultation era, including ritual and legal questions like the correct payment of the alms taxes; and theological-cosmological questions like the question of *tafwīḍ*, or God's delegation of His power to His human representatives.

So how, and when, did Abū Jaʿfar rise? Far more is told about his death and the succession to his leadership than his origins. His father's origins are shrouded in obscurity,[7] and so we are hard pressed to assess the social position of this family before they became agents. This much is clear: Abū Jaʿfar was not a scholar, and so any claims to authority arose from his institutional positioning, rather than epistemic authority. Ṭūsī attempts to establish Abū Jaʿfar's credentials as a hadith transmitter and writer of *fiqh* books in his *Ghayba*,[8] but, significantly, he does not mention him in his

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[6] It is also possible that the last surviving man who was succeeded by the hidden agent mentioned in one passage of the *Tanbīh* is *not* the same as the one man about whom the community was unanimous and who ordered the people to secrecy, mentioned in another passage. However, this seems extremely unlikely, as both passages contain the same archetype: of the old guard issuing letters, followed by his death and a rupture in communications.

[7] In contrast to all other later sources, Kashshī calls the father Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr, though he agrees with others in calling the son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad. *Rijāl*, 377.

[8] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 226.

Fihrist, where one would expect a mention of any significant works,[9] and neither did Najāshī in his *Rijāl*, indicating that Abū Jaʿfar played no real role in the Imami ecosystem of knowledge, and that attempts to depict Abū Jaʿfar as a scholar were apologetic, rather than being from a real appreciation of his scholarly contribution.[10]

Abū Jaʿfar's leadership was little mentioned by early hadith compilers before Ibn Bābūya. Kulaynī refers to him only fleetingly, in the *thiqa* hadith,[11] discussed in Chapter 4. Kashshī has little to say about him, but does acknowledge his role thus: "As for Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr, he was the son of al-ʿAmrī, and he was the agent of the *nāḥiya* and the leadership (*amr*) revolved around him."[12] In this brief statement, Kashshī acknowledges the Occultation-era centrality of Abū Jaʿfar, if we understand, as we should,[13] that the *nāḥiya* refers to specifically Occultation-era institutions of Imamic representation, rather than the agents of earlier Imams. Notably, Kashshī does not mention his father, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, as having a part in this Occultation-era leadership. Though Abū Jaʿfar did not belong to the old guard as understood by Abū Sahl, there is no reason to doubt that he may have been active within the institutions of the Imamate in some capacity in the earliest phase of the Occultation, before his preeminent authority was accepted. Given that he died in 304–5/916–17, Abū Jaʿfar would have been aged around twenty to thirty years in 260/874, if we assume that he lived into his seventies or eighties. Thus, we can assume that in his late teens and through his twenties, Abū Jaʿfar may have been inducted into the protocols of the agentship through his father, who worked for the tenth and eleventh Imams.[14] We might compare this phase of apprenticeship to the Ahwāzī agent

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[9] Ṭūsī does mention him in his *Rijāl*, but with no suggestion that he authored books. *Rijāl*, 447.

[10] There was an idea circulating that it was through scholarship and hadith transmission that the Imams were to be known in the new era. Kashshī's *Rijāl* begins with a series of hadith that explicitly indicate that the transmission of hadith was the primary criterion for judging the status of the followers of the Imams: "Abū ʿAbd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] said: Know the degree of the [Imam's] men with respect to us according to the degree of their transmission of reports from us." Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 1–5. In addition, there was a famous hadith circulating that the scholars would be the "heirs of the prophets," though in Shiʿism, that had typically been applied to the Imams themselves, during their lives, rather than the regular scholars. Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 33–36.

[11] As I argue above, the mention of Abū Jaʿfar's name in the *thiqa* hadith involving Aḥmad b. Isḥāq appears to be a later interpolation.

[12] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377.

[13] See Chapter 4, in which I establish that the *nāḥiya* is a specifically Occultation-era usage.

[14] Ṭūsī, in his *Rijāl*, places ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd in the chapter on companions of the tenth Imam, Hādī: "ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī bearing the *kunya* Abū ʿAmr, known as the oil merchant

Ibn Maḥziyār's inheritance of his agentship from his father[15] or the early career of the third canonical envoy, Ibn Rawḥ, who purportedly acted as the secretary of Abū Jaʿfar during his lifetime, drawing a stipend of thirty dinars a month, before succeeding to the position of envoy after Abū Jaʿfar's death.[16] However, I have found no unambiguous references to direct collaboration between Abū Jaʿfar and the other pivotal early Occultation figures like Aḥmad b. Isḥāq or Ḥājiz. When Abū Jaʿfar claimed leadership, he did so through the symbolic legacy of his father, rather than a practical collaboration with the active old guard agents.

ABŪ JAʿFAR AS A NEOPHYTE, AND HIS CLAIMS TO AUTHORITY

Evidence that Abū Jaʿfar's rise came after the leadership of the old guard becomes clear from the fact that he was considered as an upstart by some members of the older generation. Ṭūsī cites a report (through Abū ʿAlī b. Hammām al-Iskāfī) in which a certain Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī,[17] a companion of the eleventh Imam, denies the agentship of Abū Jaʿfar on the grounds that he did not know him to have been appointed by an Imam:

I did not hear [the Imam] designate [Abū Jaʿfar] for the agentship (*wikāla*) but I do not deny his father [meaning ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd]. As for stating with certainty that Abū Jaʿfar is the agent of the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*), well, I do not dare to.[18]

It seems that, for Aḥmad b. Hilāl, the authority of an agent came only through designation by an Imam.[19] Before the firm establishment of the Occultation as doctrine, that meant the designation of the dead Imam.[20]

(*al-zayyāt*). He served [the Imam] (AS) from the age of eleven, and he had a well-known commission on [the Imam's] behalf (*wa lahu ilayhi ʿahd maʿrūf*)." Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 390. This is suggestive, but provides little unambiguous information.

[15] Ibn Maḥyziyār. See Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:813, and discussion below.

[16] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231. See Chapter 6.

[17] We should not confuse him, as Jassim Hussain does, with Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-ʿAbartāʾī, known as "the counterfeit Sufi." Hussain, *Occultation*, 99–102. See Modarressi for a correction of this mistake. *Crisis*, 67n63. This is an important distinction to make, for Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-ʿAbartāʾī died in AH 267, according to Najāshī.

[18] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248.

[19] This is, no doubt, a key reason that the early canonizing statement about the succession of authority of the envoys mentioned above is explicit about the fact that both the Imam and the previous envoy designate the new envoy.

[20] There were, of course, the rescripts of the hidden Imam, but these provided only a rather circular means of legitimation, for if the authority of the agent was not trusted, then how could the authenticity of the rescripts be trusted?

Before the *thiqa* hadith was edited to include Abū Jaʿfar alongside his father, it seems that no good evidence was available to satisfy Aḥmad b. Hilāl that Abū Jaʿfar had an Imamic appointment.

In the same report from Ibn Hammām, opposition to Abū Jaʿfar's rise is strongly associated with the death of Ḥasan:

Aḥmad b. Hilāl was one of the companions of Abū Muḥammad (AS) [al-ʿAskarī], and the Shiʿa agreed upon the agentship (*wikāla*) of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān (RAA) by the designation (*naṣṣ*) of al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) during his lifetime. When al-Ḥasan died (AS), the Shiʿa who agreed upon him said, "Don't you accept the leadership (*amr*) of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān and refer to him, for he was designated by the Imam to whom obedience is obligatory?"

This statement clearly attempts to place Abū Jaʿfar (and not his father, as the classical four-envoy paradigm tends to suggest) as succeeding to pre-eminent leadership directly upon the death of the eleventh Imam. Although he transmits Aḥmad b. Hilāl's dissent, Ibn Hammām attempts to defuse it with his own commentary.[21] While we cannot now adjudicate between Aḥmad b. Hilāl and Ibn Hammām, we can at least say with confidence that there were opposing forces among the Imamiyya. Some aimed at establishing the priority of Abū Jaʿfar's authority, others rejected the idea that his agentship had the Imamic imprimatur and regarded him as a neophyte.

Attitudes like Aḥmad b. Hilāl's inevitably lead to a crisis upon the death of the old guard agents. If, as like Aḥmad b. Hilāl seems to have demanded, authority was vested only through designation by the dead Imam, this precluded the renewal of authority structures into the new era after those appointed by the Imam died out. In response, Abū Jaʿfar, as a member of the younger generation, had to cobble together new and old sources of legitimacy. Chronologically, the first of these was probably the appeal to succeed to his father's authority.

Eventually, the challenge of Aḥmad b. Hilāl and others was met by potent acts of representation. These acts involved both staging scenes of the political-bureaucratic theater of the Imamate to persuade doubters of his legitimacy, and also disseminating reports regarding his legitimacy.

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[21] Can this be taken as an indication that Abū Jaʿfar started asserting his authority at the moment of the death of the eleventh Imam? Perhaps, but it should be noted that there was a particular polemical function to be gained by pushing Abū Jaʿfar's authority back as early as possible, which justifies our mistrust of such a conclusion. See in Chapter 4 a report in which Ibn Hammām provides dates for Abū Jaʿfar's death and the length of his leadership (*amr*), in which he also seems to exclude the elder ʿAmrī from the Occultation-era agentship.

A key case in the dissemination of reports to support Abū Jaʿfar can be seen in the example of the *thiqa* hadith, quoted in Chapter 4, which asserts that Abū Jaʿfar had been designated by the Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. The *thiqa* hadith is a version of an older hadith which had not mentioned Abū Jaʿfar, suggesting it had been repurposed to support his claim.[22] The transmission history suggests that this act of repurposing may have taken place during Abū Jaʿfar's lifetime. The updated recension of this hadith was compiled and circulated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī,[23] who is known from other sources for his efforts to propagate the idea of the hidden child Imam.[24] Thus, whatever the initial rejections of Abū Jaʿfar's authority by the likes of Aḥmad b. Hilāl,[25] his charisma as Imamic spokesman was

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[22] In a similar way, in Ibn Mahziyār's rescript (addressed below) the word *thiqa* appears as a pivotal descriptor for the authority of the ʿAmrīs, but Ibn Mahziyār's rescript differs in that Abū Jaʿfar is *not* described as the *thiqa* of the eleventh Imam, but rather of the twelfth Imam, during the lifetime of his father. This suggests that Abū Jaʿfar's rise to authority was established through a retrospective recourse to his father's authority in the Occultation period, rather than directly to the eleventh Imam.

[23] ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī was one of the younger-generation Qummī scholars who was most energetically engaged in making sense of the new era: as we see from his list of books in Najāshī's *Rijāl*, he wrote a work entitled, *The Occultation and the Perplexity* (*al-Ghayba wa-l-ḥayra*), and he is a key transmitter for hadiths from the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar.

[24] Al-Ḥimyarī was clearly interested in supporting the idea of the Occultation with a book called *The Shortest Chain of Transmission to the Lord of the Age* (*Kitāb qurb al-isnād ilā ṣāḥib al-amr*) (AS). Najāshī mentions that he composed a book called *The Book of Occultation and Perplexity* (*Kitāb al-ghayba wa-l-ḥayra*). Ṭūsī adds, in his *Fihrist*, the title of a work which may be the same as this one mentioned by Najāshī, which Ṭūsī calls *The Book of the Interlude [between Imams] and the Perplexity* (*Kitāb al-fatra wa-l-ḥayra*) which tantalizingly suggests that ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar was engaged somehow in the debate about whether there could be a pause in the succession of Imams. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 167. We know that ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī traveled to Kufa to transmit reports around 290/303 as Najāshī notes. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219. Given the correlation of this date with the chronology of the deaths of the old guard suggested by Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*, it is tempting to speculate whether this moment marked the beginnings of active propagation of the Occultation idea. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī was clearly concerned with the preservation of Imamic knowledge in the form of collections of responsa from various Imams from Hādī until the hidden Imam. Thus Najāshī lists among Ḥimyarī's works *The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad and the Rescripts* (*Masāʾil Abī Muḥammad wa-l-tawqīʿāt*), which Ṭūsī calls, *The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] by the Hand of Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī* (*Masāʾil li-Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) ʿalā yad Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī*). This latter variant is problematic, however, as I have not found any hadith transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī through Abū Jaʿfar which leads back to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī.

[25] The dissent of Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī, a companion of Ḥasan, may have been an issue after the tenure of Abū Jaʿfar: we are told that an Imamic rescript of cursing and ostracism was issued at the hand of his successor, Ibn Rawḥ, perhaps therefore after Abū Jaʿfar's death in 305/917 as a retroactive defense of the increasingly important envoy figure. Ṭūsī,

woven into reports that were circulated during his lifetime, and preserved for posterity.[26]

LEGITIMATION THROUGH THE FATHER

Among the most historically significant of the reports that legitimate Abū Jaʿfar's authority are the rescripts which purport to issue from the hidden Imam. (For an example of what these might have looked like, see Figure 7.[27]) It is noteworthy that several of these rescripts relate to Abū
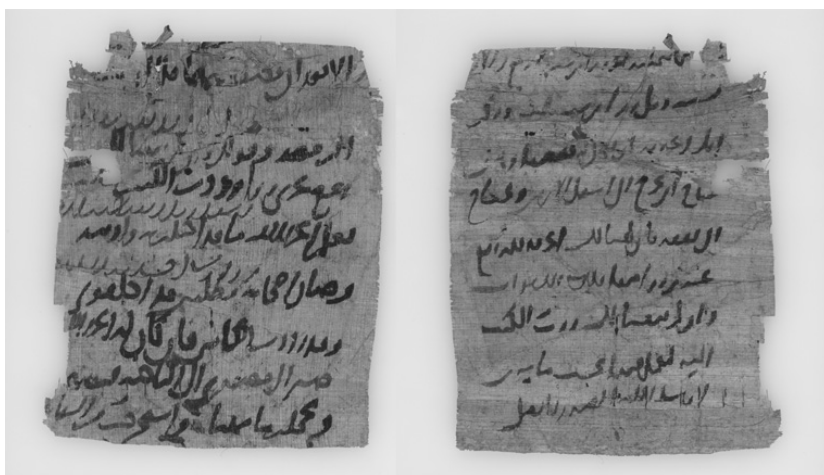
FIGURE 7 Third-/ninth-century Arabic letter with its response written overleaf

Ghayba, 248. It is, possible, of course, that this rescript was issued by Ibn Rawḥ during Abū Jaʿfar's lifetime, with Ibn Rawḥ acting in his role as subordinate agent to Abū Jaʿfar.

[26] Much of what ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī knew about the Occultation was transmitted to his fellow Qummī, Ibn Bābūya, whose *Kamāl* includes several key narratives that include ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar in their chains of transmission, both for accounts of the Occultation and also for information about the life and activities of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī.

[27] Here we see a letter with the response written directly upon the original letter, much as the Imam's replies to his followers might have appeared. The original letter, a request that the writer's business associate might pay his debt, is written on the recto (pictured here on the right), with the response in a different hand, written on the other side (pictured here on the left). The image of this papyrus has been kindly provided by the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, of which it is a part, inventory number PPS 269. Date on document: AH [30]3, [30]4. An edition of the text and a translation can be found, papyrus no. 28, in Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Papyri: Selected Material from the Khalili Collection* (Oxford: Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992) 209–10; and a reedition and translation into German, papyrus no. 1, in Werner Diem, "Philologisches zu den Khalili Papyri," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 83 (1993): 39–81.

Jaʿfar's rise upon the death of his father, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd.[28] These reports implicitly suggest that the father's death had been a watershed moment and something of a problem to be solved. One of these helpfully provides the date when it was circulated, suggesting the time frame in which Abū Jaʿfar's claim to legitimacy was being actively contested:

Muḥammad b. Ḥamawayh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rāzī told us in 280[/893–94]:

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī said that after the death of Abū ʿAmr [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī] the following was issued to him:

"The son [Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī], may God protect him, was always our trust-worthy agent (*thiqa*) during the lifetime of the father [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd] . . . The son commands from our command, and he acts according to it, may God befriend him."[29]

We do not know when ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd died, or when this rescript was first issued, but the fact it was being circulated in 280/893–94 is highly suggestive. It is probably not a coincidence that this is precisely the moment at which, Abū Sahl tells us, all the old guard agents had died out except one: it was a time when explicit evidence was demanded to support claims of being the successor to the old guard agents. Another indication that there was a concerted effort to display continuity between the father and the son was the emphatic assertion we find in several accounts that the handwriting of the rescripts issued under father and son was the same.[30] While the rupture after the old guard agents is not acknowledged directly

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[28] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 224–25; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510.   [29] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.

[30] Often, these statements do not explicitly indicate whether the handwriting belonged to the Imam or to Abū Jaʿfar. ʿAbd Allah b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, for example, transmitted the following: "When Abū ʿAmr died (RAA), letters came to us appointing Abū Jaʿfar (RAA) to his office (RAA) in the handwriting in which we had corresponded with [the Imam]." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225. In a canonizing statement, transmitted by Ibn Barniya, as a synthesis of what he had heard from his masters he states, "And the rescripts (*tawqīʿāt*) were issued by his hand to the Shiʿa regarding important matters throughout his life, with the handwriting which used to issue during the life of his father ʿUthmān." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225–26. Another account states that the similarity in handwriting was due to the fact that it was, "the handwriting of our Master (*mawlā*), the Lord of the House (*ṣāḥib al-dār*)." The transmitted rescript provides support for Abū Jaʿfar: "and as for Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī, may God be pleased with him and with his father before him, for he is my *thiqa*, and his book is my book." Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483–85. See also the discussion of this rescript below. Recent scholarship has suggested that perhaps the continuity was due to the fact that Abū Jaʿfar had been taking down the rescripts himself already for some time, as an Imamic amanuensis. See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 94. Arjomand follows him. "Crisis," 502. On the other hand, an earlier case exists in which Imam Ḥasan addresses Aḥmad b. Isḥāq instructing the agent *not* to pay any attention to differences in handwriting as an evidentiary mechanism, because handwriting can change "between a coarse pen and a fine pen, but don't doubt!" Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:513–14.

in these succession statements,[31] their particular concern to demonstrate continuity in handwriting suggests that the issue of continuity between generations of agents required substantiation. The appeal to handwriting was used as an apologetic tool to argue that nothing had changed once Abū Jaʿfar rose to a leadership role after his father's death.

<div style="text-align:center">FORMALIZING THE ʿAMRĪ SUCCESSION: <i>NAṢṢ</i> AND <i>WAṢIYYA</i></div>

The statement quoted above, and others like it, indicate clearly the way in which Abū Jaʿfar appealed to his father's authority to substantiate his own.[32] In the following generations, this claim of ʿAmrī succession was formalized into dogma. Thus, following these statements of succession in his *Ghayba*, Ṭūsī makes a canonizing statement in which the principle of succession between the ʿAmrīs was established both through the eleventh Imam's *naṣṣ* designation of the two ʿAmrīs together as in the *thiqa* hadith,[33] but also through the father's *naṣṣ* designation of his son.[34] Ṭūsī's idea of one agent making a *naṣṣ* designation of his successor is a doctrinal formulation intended to support the idea of succession between envoys. Ṭūsī cites a couple of further instances in which the doctrine of *naṣṣ* designation is applied to the succession between the ʿAmrīs, father and son, but these come from relatively late authorities.[35] The rescripts

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[31] Though, in addition to the testimony of Abū Sahl, we do have clear references to a rupture to be discussed below.

[32] Beyond the case of succession, Abū Jaʿfar relied on his father's authority in other ways also, including as an eyewitness to establish the birth of the son of Ḥasan and its celebration. This dynamic suggests that Abū Jaʿfar was actively disseminating stories bearing his father's authority which underscored the crystallizing Occultation doctrine from which he drew his own authority. See, for example, an account in which Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī depicts his father as distributing, on Imam Ḥasan's orders, 10,000 *raṭl*s of meat and 10,000 *raṭl*s of bread to be divided as alms among the Banū Hāshim, in celebration of the birth of the child Imam. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 430–31. See also ibid., 409. Of course, transmitting reports on the authority of one's father is nothing out of the ordinary, nor is hereditary succession. These mechanisms were both deeply embedded in society, but also useful as ways of embedding new claims to authority through old channels.

[33] Following Ḥimyarī's recension of the *thiqa* hadith.   [34] See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 223.

[35] For example, Ibn Barniya's testimony in Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225–26. As Klemm notes, Ibn Barniya lived a little earlier than Ṭūsī, and was a contemporary of Najāshī, who claimed to have seen him for the last time in the year 400/1009–10. Klemm, "*Sufarāʾ*," 148. The earliest authority to acknowledge the *naṣṣ* designation between the ʿAmrīs was Ibn Hammām, who, as we have seen in Chapter 4, asserted Abū Jaʿfar's appointment to agentship through "the designation (*naṣṣ*) of al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) during his life-time." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248. He does not, however, report a *naṣṣ* designation of the father to the son, which represents a different kind of claim from the Imamic designation of the two ʿAmrīs. Likewise, Ibn Hammām applies the language "standing in my place," rather than

which go back to earlier authorities, however, tend instead to use the less doctrinally technical phrase, "he took his place" (*qāma maqāmahu*).[36] The earliest technical vocabulary applied to the designation of succession between agents comes from Abū Jaʿfar's contemporary Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, again in his *Tanbīh*. Within a variegated language describing the roles of the mediators for the hidden Imam, Abū Sahl mentions appointment of a successor (*waṣī*) in its verbal form (*awṣā*), alongside, again, the phrase "he took his place" (*qāma maqāmahu*).[37] *Waṣiyya* is not identical to *naṣṣ* designation, but these terms are often paired in Imami sources. Abū Sahl does not apply the language of *naṣṣ* directly to the ʿAmrīs, nor indeed mention them at all. However, it is noteworthy that Abū Sahl's application of this language occurs at the same time as the rise of Abū Jaʿfar, and he applies it to the agents whose legacy Abū Jaʿfar was claiming. Abū Sahl's use is the first clearly datable instance of the application of Imamic doctrinal language to the succession of agents. A decade later, Abū Jaʿfar was succeeded as envoy by Ibn Rawḥ, and this succession is, too, characterized in terms of *naṣṣ* and *waṣiyya*.[38] By the time of Ṭūsī, the formal, doctrinally stable succession of unbroken authority was a key element of a theologically defensible Occultation.

DOUBTING AGENTS: IBN MAHZIYĀR OF AHWĀZ

As the Occultation faction began to crystallize there was a backlash from agents who rejected the embryonic doctrinal framework of the Occultation. One of the most important cases is that of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār, who is famous in the tradition for his Damascene conversion from doubt to support of the Occultation faction and Abū Jaʿfar. Indeed, he himself transmitted the rescript quoted above in which the hidden Imam legitimated the ʿAmrī succession. However, the reports about Ibn Mahziyār are complex and contradictory in detail and dating. Nonetheless, because his case illuminates this important shift from

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the quasi-Imamic language of *naṣṣ* designation to the succession between Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ. Ibid., 231.

[36] See, for example, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī's quotation of a rescript of succession in Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510.

[37] The vocabulary used at this time is indicative of a striving to generate appropriate terms to describe a quickly evolving situation. The key term Abū Sahl uses is "reliable man" (*thiqa*) but he also uses *bāb* and *sabab*. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88–94.

[38] See Chapter 6 for a discussion of this succession.

doubt to supporting Abū Jaʿfar as envoy, we must expend a certain effort in attempting to untangle them.

The support of Ibn Mahziyār was clearly worth having. He was the agent for Ahwāz, and so his conversion would have been politically signifi-cant, perhaps helping to bring the community in Ahwāz with him into the fold of the Occultation faction. Moreover, in contrast to other prominent Occultation figures like Ḥājiz and ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Ibn Mahziyār is well-attested in the biographical sources, coming from a prestigious family of hadith transmitters, including a famous uncle and a well-known father.[39] This pedigree allowed him to act as a key witness both to the existence of the hidden Imam, and later also to the legitimacy of Abū Jaʿfar.

Several reports refer to Ibn Mahziyār's hereditary succession to the agentship of Ahwāz. Kashshī depicts Ibn Mahziyār as going to his father upon his deathbed and receiving instructions about what to do with the money of the Imamate, upon which the father provides his son with secret signs which al-ʿAmrī (meaning in this case, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd)[40] correctly interprets in order to collect the money, though it is unclear whether this occurred before or after the Occultation.[41] Kashshī's story fits into a familiar trope of the semi-miraculous proof of the legitimacy of the

[39] According to the biographical dictionaries, Muḥammad b. Mahziyār's uncle, ʿAlī b. Mahziyār, was a Christian who converted to Islam, and became a highly regarded follower of the Imams from Riḍā until Hādī, and became the agent for Ahwāz. ʿAlī b. Mahziyār transmitted many hadith, and authored many books of law and doctrine. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār was the brother of ʿAlī, and transmitted his books. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 253–54; Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 388; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 152. Muḥammad was the son of Ibrāhīm, and is mentioned among the *rijāl* of the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan, though not receiving the status of reliable (*thiqa*) or sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) in Ṭūsī's *Rijāl*, as other members of his family do, presumably because of his moment of doubt. Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 402.

[40] Though the narrative does not explicitly state the identity of which ʿAmrī is involved, the explanatory note added to the end of the report refers to Abū Jaʿfar as "the son of al-ʿAmrī," indicating that we must identify the "ʿAmrī" in the narrative as the elder ʿAmrī, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Even though the name of the elder ʿAmrī agent here is Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr, rather than ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, it seems reasonable to identify him as the same figure as ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd.

[41] In Kashshī's report, there is no mention of the death of the eleventh Imam. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:813. In one report, the father, Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār, is depicted as surviving *after* the death of the eleventh Imam, though this report appears particularly mythic in its register, throwing doubt on its utility as a source for dating. The report is elaborate and miraculous, with a self-consciously literary style, including the use of rhymed prose, which sets it apart from the majority of shorter, more telegraphic early Occultation reports. In it, Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār not only survives the eleventh Imam, but goes in search of the twelfth Imam and meets him at his hideout in an encampment near Ṭāʾif. It is also remarkable that it refers to two sons of Ḥasan, one called Mūsā, the other called M-Ḥ-M-D, though this detail tends to indicate that it is an early report generated before canonization. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 445–53.

Imam and the agents of the *nāḥiya*. The Ibn Mahziyār family thus is depicted as having been bound to the ʿAmrīs through the secret protocols of the Imamate.

In some reports there is a suggestion that the death of the elder Ibn Mahziyār occurred at a time when the idea of the Occultation was still poorly established, forcing his son to make a difficult decision. Dating these reports is uncertain, but a couple of reports about the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār suggest that it occurred early, soon after the death of the eleventh Imam.[42] For example, in a report quoted by Khaṣībī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār[43] says, "I doubted after the death of Abū Muḥammad."[44] In another report, quoted in Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, when the death of his father leaves Ibn Mahziyār with "a great deal of money" due to the Imam, Ibn Mahziyār says to himself:

I will carry this money to Iraq and hire a house on the shore and not tell anyone anything and if something becomes clear to me like the clarity in the days of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] then I will send it, and if not, I will lead a life of opulence[45] with it.[46]

This fits with other reports regarding the earliest phase of the Occultation, such as the Qummī delegation hadiths, which show the agents arriving in Iraq soon after the death of Ḥasan, and looking for a suitable recipient for the canonical taxes. It also encodes the idea of the noncompliant agent as being essentially concerned with worldly pleasures, rather than the afterlife, recalling the earlier resistance of the Wāqifī agents against the claims of the eighth canonical Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā. Here, however, no ʿAmrī is mentioned.

When Ibn Mahziyār's doubt was dispelled, it is depicted as a dramatic moment. The Ibn Mahziyār reports can be grouped roughly into two kinds: first, those which indicate no knowledge of Abū Jaʿfar's claims to the agentship and which suggest a pre-envoy conception of Occultation-era mediation; and secondly, those in which Abū Jaʿfar appears as instrumental. In the reports which have a clearly early setting, there is no mention of the ʿAmrīs. Instead, in its early stages, the representation of the hidden Imam is depicted as an anonymous institution controlling access to a miraculously self-manifesting Imam. This split suggests that either there were two phases

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[42] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276–77.
[43] In fact, it reads "Mahdiyār," but this is clearly an error, as this figure is clearly recognizable as Ibn Mahziyār.
[44] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276–77.
[45] This idea of "leading the life of opulence" here shows a kinship with the critiques of Wāqifī agents who withheld money from ʿAlī al-Riḍā from financial motives, as well as with the supporters of Jaʿfar "the Liar" who absconded with the money collected on his behalf.
[46] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518.

in Ibn Mahziyār's relationship with the Occultation faction, or that versions of Ibn Mahziyār's story were retrospectively redacted to insert Abū Jaʿfar into the story.

Ibn Bābūya quotes a rescript issued to Ibn Mahziyār to address his doubt, followed by a narrative in which Ibn Mahziyār takes a trip to Samarra to see for himself. This narrative is distinctive in the mysterious theatricality with which Ibn Mahziyār is inducted into the inner sanctum of the Imams' house:

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm said:

I came to Samarra (al-ʿAskar) on pilgrimage (*zāʾiran*) and I headed for the *nāḥiya*. And a woman met me and said, "Are you Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm?"

I said, "Yes."

She said to me, "Turn back, for you will not make contact at this time, but come back tonight, and the gate will be open to you, then enter the house and head for the room in which is the lamp [e.g. see Figure 8⁴⁷]."

I did that, and I headed for the door, and sure enough, it was open and I entered the house and I headed for the room which she had described, and then suddenly

Figure 8 Lamp

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[47] Lamp, openwork sheet brass, Iraq or Iran; tenth century; height without chain: 26 cm; diameter: 40 cm. Along with a fragment in Chicago and a lamp in Kairouan, this metal mosque lamp is the oldest extant one in the Islamic world. David Collection, Copenhagen, Inv. no. 17/1970, photographer Pernille Klemp.

I was between the two tombs, weeping and crying, and lo! I heard a voice saying, "O Muḥammad, fear God and repent what you were about! For you have been invested with great authority (*qullidta amran ʿaẓīman*)."[48]

This account of an anonymous woman representing the Imam (perhaps a servant or family member) is in keeping with other early Occultation-era accounts in which the Shiʿa attempt to reach the Imam in Samarra, and contact is made through servants or householders. It is also one of several accounts in which the Imam is represented by a hidden or disembodied voice that seems to exist between the mundane and the miraculous.[49] The fact that this experience of contact with the Imam is depicted here as taking place in the house of the Imams in Samarra, between the tombs of the tenth and eleventh Imams, suggests that it refers to an early stage in the Occultation era, before Jaʿfar "the Liar" took possession of the house, probably, therefore between 260/874 and 262/876.[50] The chain of transmission goes through Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh who died in 299–301/911–14, before Abū Jaʿfar, therefore reducing the likelihood of posthumous redaction. Again, there is no mention of the ʿAmrīs here, or, indeed, any figures clearly acting as agents. The early *nāḥiya* in the Ibn Mahziyār reports is depicted as an anonymous organ based in the house of the Imams, guarding a miraculously self-manifesting Imam. The voice calls upon Ibn Mahziyār to repent, after which, we understand him to have reported upon his experiences, becoming both a witness to the existence of the hidden Imam, and a convert to an embryonic Occultation doctrine.

IBN MAHZIYĀR TRANSFORMED INTO A PRO-ABŪ JAʿFAR FIGURE

Two dimensions of Ibn Mahziyār's story became important sources of legitimation for Abū Jaʿfar's camp: first, his witness to the existence of the hidden Imam; and second, his assent to ʿAmrī leadership. Three rescripts of the hidden Imam are associated with Ibn Mahziyār's name, together suggesting a certain chronology, which, for clarity, I will refer to as "the eclectic rescript," "the doubt-dispelling rescript," and "the succession rescript." The first, issued at the hand of Abū Jaʿfar, is an eclectic set of responses to legal, theological,

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[48] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 487.

[49] See, for example, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277–78, and the same of Asadī's miraculously amended rescript discussed below.

[50] It seems that Jaʿfar did take possession of the house, probably after the division of the inheritance, for he is said to have resisted the burial of Ḥasan's mother in the house, which presupposes that he was in possession of it at the time of her death. See above.

and political issues. In it, Ibn Mahziyār's[51] doubt is mentioned, and his conversion is predicted in the future. It also affirms the succession between ʿAmrīs, father and son.[52] A second text, "the doubt-dispelling rescript," is described as having been issued directly to Ibn Mahziyār to dispel his doubt after the death of Imam Ḥasan, though no mention is made of Abū Jaʿfar.[53] A third text preserved by Ṭūsī, "the succession rescript," was transmitted sometime before 280/893–94 by Ibn Mahziyār himself. It legitimates the succession of Abū Jaʿfar to his deceased father and emphasizes the authority he holds in the name of the hidden Imam.[54]

Table 4 summarizes the major points of the traditions and rescripts relating to Ibn Mahziyār.

The eclectic rescript purports to have been issued from the hidden Imam at the hand of Abū Jaʿfar in response to a set of questions, and it pours

TABLE 4 Reports about Ibn Mahziyār

Report	Dating	Status of Ibn Mahziyār	Status of ʿAmrīs
The doubt-dispelling rescript issued to Ibn Mahziyār[55]	Soon after death of eleventh Imam probably before 262/876 (Jaʿfar not yet in the Imam's house?)	Ibn Mahziyār still doubts but seeking answers	No mention of ʿAmrīs
The succession rescript[56] transmitted by Ibn Mahziyār	After ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's death, but before 280/893–94	Ibn Mahziyār supporter of ʿAmrīs and Occultation faction	Affirms Abū Jaʿfar's succession. His father recently deceased

Continued

[51] Note that there is a certain problem with the names here. In general, the doubting agent is known as Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār, but in the eclectic rescript he is known as Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mahziyār. They are probably the same person, but it is not impossible that there were several doubting agents from the same family. This is also Arjomand's judgment. "Imam *Absconditus*," 4–5; and Khūʾī, referenced by ibid., 5n34.
[52] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483–85. See discussion below.   [53] Ibid., 8, 241–43.
[54] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.   [55] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 8, 241–43.   [56] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.

TABLE 4 Continued

Report	Dating	Status of Ibn Mahziyār	Status of ʿAmrīs
The eclectic rescript issued to Abū Jaʿfar[57]	No clear dating	Ibn Mahziyār mentioned as still doubting, but his conversion is predicted.	Abū Jaʿfar's succession is affirmed. His father presumed to be deceased[58]

opprobrium upon Jaʿfar "the Liar" and his offspring, suggesting that the rescript dates to or evokes a time in which Abū Jaʿfar and his companions were pitted against the supporters of Jaʿfar "the Liar." The eclectic rescript has been translated and discussed in an article by Arjomand, in which he rightly indicates its great importance for understanding the concerns of the early Occultation period, but without providing clear evidence, he mischaracterizes it as the last artifact from the old guard correspondence with the hidden Imam. Arjomand concludes that, "the reference to Jaʿfar *and his son* suggests that the rescript was written after his death, most probably in 894–95/281."[59] However, there is no reason to think that the rescript must have been issued after Jaʿfar's death just because his son is mentioned. Arjomand also asserts without evidence that this is the last letter from the hidden Imam until the accession of Ibn Rawḥ to the envoyship.[60]

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[57] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483–85.

[58] This rescript provides a statement to legitimize Abū Jaʿfar, saying that "God is pleased with him and with his father before him," suggesting that the father has passed away. See also Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 4.

[59] Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 4 (emphasis in original).

[60] He calls it "a rescript issued by the bureau of the Imam shortly after 894/281, which can be considered the last communication before the Imam *absconditus* is sealed off from the community of believers." Ibid., 2. Elsewhere Arjomand states, "On 9 April 918, the newly ensconced *safir*, Husayn ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti, produced the first new decree issued by the hidden imam." "Crisis," 507. It is unclear how Arjomand came to this conclusion. Many Imamic letters purport to have been distributed at the hand of Abū Jaʿfar, and many of them are not dated. Thus it would seem strange and rather foolhardy to assert, even if we could accept his fragile dating of this particular one, that none of the undated letters postdated it. Modarressi, upon whom Arjomand relies heavily for most aspects of his dating scheme, instead states more defensibly, "Sometime around 280–285/893–898 the correspondence from the Holy Threshold stopped, and no more rescripts were issued. The situation continued at least until around 290/903 [i.e. when Abū Sahl wrote the *Tanbīh*]." *Crisis*, 94. However, the question is complicated by the fact that Abū Sahl shows no clear sign of accepting Abū Jaʿfar as having been envoy in the *Tanbīh*, and so the correspondence he mentions as having been cut off might not have taken into account any letters issued by Abū Jaʿfar.

Instead, the sequence suggested by internal evidence in the full array of reports gives the impression that Ibn Mahziyār converted soon after the death of the eleventh Imam, in the tempestuous couple of years when Jaʿfar "the Liar" and the Imam's mother were battling over the inheritance of the Imam. We do not know when ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's death occurred, but Ibn Mahziyār's succession rescript suggests that it might also have occurred early, after which the succession rescript was recirculated a couple of decades later upon the crisis precipitated by the deaths of the old guard: around 280/893–94. If we assume that they reflect the events they purport to, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Ibn Mahziyār converted very early on in the Occultation era.[61] Meanwhile, the eclectic rescript predicts Ibn Mahziyār's conversion in the future. As is know from the study of prophecy as a genre, prophecies are usually dated as having been written *after*, not before, the last event prophesized.[62] That is to say, that because Ibn Mahziyār's conversion is predicted in the eclectic rescript, it is likely to have been written as a back-projection by someone who was aware that this conversion had already taken place. However, it may well have included earlier elements which were stitched together with the prophecy. It may well have circulated before Arjomand's dating of it to 282/895.[63] The conversion narratives which omit any mention of the ʿAmrīs suggest that Ibn Mahziyār's initial doubt about the hidden Imam was vanquished before general acceptance of Abū Jaʿfar as envoy. The eclectic rescript, meanwhile, purports to have been issued at the hand of Abū Jaʿfar, thereby implying the envoy's involvement in Ibn Mahziyār's conversion. The eclectic rescript, therefore, was probably put down in its final form as a retrospective amalgam which associated earlier events with Abū Jaʿfar's claim to the envoyship.[64] Thus, we can perhaps imagine a two-phase process. In the first phase, Abū Jaʿfar was perhaps working

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[61] This sense is confirmed by our sources' intentional use of his name as an Occultation faction agent who supported Abū Jaʿfar. If he did not support Abū Jaʿfar, then it would have been harder to employ him thus.

[62] See, for example, the predictions of the fall of iniquitous empires in the Book of Daniel. John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 92–98.

[63] The eclectic rescript is unlikely to have been generated much later than the death of Abū Jaʿfar, as it pertains to struggles and discourses going on during his lifetime: in particular the rescript responds to the possibility of immediate return of the Mahdī; as well as the recognition of agents of that time like Ibn Mahziyār, and the cursing of Jaʿfar and his sons.

[64] This is not to say that it is impossible that Abū Jaʿfar was involved with Ibn Mahziyār's early conversion, but only that there was a process in which the idea of his involvement was recirculated as a miraculous prophecy.

alongside the old guard who claimed to be Imamic intermediaries. He may also have had a certain authority accepted by a small cohort at an early date after the death of Ḥasan. This was followed by a second phase characterized by the more muscular assertion of Abū Jaʿfar's claims around the time of the deaths of the old guard agents between 280/893 and 290/903, during which his old associations were exploited to suggest that his authority had been continuous since the death of the eleventh Imam, claims which were probably only fully established after his death. It is not improbable that Ibn Mahziyār really did lend his support to Abū Jaʿfar, but the story of his conversion became a more effective legitimating mechanism if it explicitly placed Abū Jaʿfar as a pivotal figure of Imamic mediation instead of the anonymous intermediaries.

ASADĪ: A KEY AGENT SUPPORTER OF ABŪ JAʿFAR

Another agent who was a crucial early supporter of Abū Jaʿfar was Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī. Unlike many early Occultation agents, Asadī is relatively well-known and easy to identify in the *rijāl* works, being a scholar with recognized books.[65] Later authorities are generally well-disposed to him, though there is a suggestion that he may have been accused of some kind of unorthodox beliefs.[66] He was an agent, based in Rayy. He is usually mentioned with his tribal *nisba* "al-Asadī," though in one place he is called Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar "the Arab," suggesting he was not of *mawlā* background, but the descendant of the Arab settlers of Persia. It is notable that the ʿAmrīs, too, were said to be of the Asad tribe, perhaps thereby indicating some basis for the alliance between

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[65] According to Najāshī, he authored a book called *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā ahl al-istiṭāʿa*, its title suggesting it might have been an anti-Muʿtazili tract. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 230–31.

[66] In a report transmitted by Muḥammad b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī, we are told that "al-Asadī died in evident probity (ʿadāla), never changing, with no one accusing him." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 260–61. It becomes clear, however, that Ibn Shādhān protests too much, for in another reference he is said to have "told stories" (ʿAllāma Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 435), and a further reference states that "he was reliable (*thiqa*), sound in hadith (*ṣaḥīḥ*), except that there was an accusation (*ṭaʿn*) which necessitated his mention among the weak transmitters (*ḍuʿafāʾ*)." Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ḥaydariyya, 1392/1972), 167–68. Ṭūsī, in his *Ghayba*, places him in the subordinate category of "trustworthy people to whom the rescripts were given by those appointed to the envoyship (*sifāra*)." Intriguingly, however, though Ṭūsī makes this distinction in his *Ghayba*, he states plainly in his *Rijāl* that Asadī "was one of the *bāb*s." Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 439. It is possible that this use of *bāb* simply refers to his status as agent, but it may also imply heterodox claims to mediatory authority. As we will see below, Asadī is associated with claims to directly experience a supernatural presence.

them.[67] In addition, a certain Asadī from Rayy (perhaps Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad) appears as one of the names on Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list of the agents who saw the Imam.[68]

Although Asadī himself was a member of the younger generation, dying in 312/924–25,[69] he was said to have succeeded the old guard agent Ḥājiz, thereby providing a link between the old guard and the new generation. The case of Asadī is therefore important in helping us establish a chronology, which again strongly suggests that key steps in Abū Jaʿfar's rise occurred between 280/893 and 290/903.

As we have seen, Ḥājiz's authority as agent of a hidden Imam was doubted, but in spite of this, the reports that mention his death register consternation at what to do thereafter.[70] In one, this question of what to do after Ḥājiz is met by a rescript issued in the name of the Imam saying, "If you wish to deal with someone, then deal with al-Asadī at Rayy."[71] This appears to be a kind of statement of appointment and succession, but it is peculiar, because if Ḥājiz was based in Baghdad, then why would he be succeeded by someone based in Rayy? It is not surprising that an agent for the Jibāl should be based in Baghdad. Before the Occultation we see agents like Fāris b. Ḥātim based in Iraq, but acting for communities in the Jibāl. While Ḥājiz may have mediated for the community of Rayy and surrounding regions from his seat in Baghdad, then, his succession by an agent based in Rayy suggests that, in the absence of the Imam, centrifugal forces tended toward local control, at least until Abū Jaʿfar reimposed the centralized institutions of Imamate.

Asadī appears in our sources as an agent who participated in the activities of the *nāḥiya*, alongside other agents like Qaṭṭān, who apparently also

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[67] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 219–20.

[68] It would seem to make sense that the Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī who succeeded Ḥājiz should be identified with this agent who saw the hidden Imam on Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list. The Asadī on Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list is listed as the agent for Rayy, which would support this identification. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442–43, and my tabulation of this information in Table 3 in Chapter 4. However, this tabulation is complicated by the fact that Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī actually appears on the *isnād* of Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list, as does his son, Abū ʿAlī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī. It would seem odd, though not impossible, that Abū al-Ḥusayn would rely on the authority of Muḥammad al-Kūfī to transmit his own interaction with the hidden Imam, or even that of his father. However, this may be explained by the utility of such a compiled list. A further problem is that I have found no reports that depict Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī as seeing the hidden Imam himself. This may suggest that the man who saw the hidden Imam was his father or some other relation. At any rate, these details suggests that there was a strong family motivation to pass down Occultation stories.

[69] ʿAllāma Ḥillī *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 435.   [70] See, for example, Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 260.

[71] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

bears the title of *safīr* in another report.[72] Given that Asadī appears to have been a successor to Ḥājiz, his relationship with Abū Jaʿfar is significant, as it shows how agents embedded in different regions gave their assent to the creation of the office of envoy. But Asadī's relationship with Abū Jaʿfar is complicated. He seems to have initially drawn his authority from Ḥājiz and a direct rescript from the Imam, rather than an ʿAmrī envoy. Two further reports to be analyzed in detail below offer interesting details. In the hidden agent report, Asadī is depicted as collaborating closely with Abū Jaʿfar to collect dues. In another, Asadī receives an Imamic rescript at the hand of Abū Jaʿfar, but then receives a direct inspiration from the Imam which alters the meaning of the rescript. Both reports seem to present Asadī as subordinate to Abū Jaʿfar in his role of envoy, but both also depict Asadī as having a certain autonomous authority as agent. The accession of Asadī to agentship should probably be seen as a stage in the disintegration of the earlier Imamic networks giving way to new alliances in which autonomous agents recognized Abū Jaʿfar in his newly conceived role of preeminent envoy.

Our evaluation of the role of Asadī is greatly aided by the fact that we have some dates attached to his name. In addition to the fact of his death in 312/924–25, we also have a report that clearly dates his activities as an agent to the year 290/303, perhaps also referring to the perplexity following the death of Ḥājiz:

Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ṣāliḥ said: A certain person asked me in the year 290[/903] to take receipt (*qabḍ*) of some [dues], but I refrained from that. I wrote in consultation, and the reply came back to me, "At Rayy there is Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar the Arab [al-Asadī], so let it be paid to him, for he is one of our trustworthy ones (*thiqāt*)."[73]

This, then, shows that Asadī was operating in 290/903 at the time when Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī wrote his *Tanbīh*.[74] Moreover, it shows that there was still some doubt about the legitimacy of his agentship, suggesting that he had only recently succeeded to Ḥājiz.[75] The report is strongly

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[72] Hussain suggests that the Muḥammad b. Aḥmad mentioned in Mufīd's *Irshād* as being "the envoy" (*safīr*) is this same Qaṭṭān. *Occultation*, 93. See Mufīd, *Irshād*, 2:360. Qaṭṭān and Asadī both appear as cooperating with Abū Jaʿfar in his role as envoy in a report in Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 524.

[73] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 260.

[74] Again, this raises the question of why Abū Sahl understood communications to have been cut off.

[75] It is worth noting that there is no clear claim about Imamic representation in this report, and it could merely represent agents acting autonomously to preserve Imamic institutions without any clear claim that they had contact with the Imam.

reminiscent of those we have quoted above regarding the consternation at the death of Ḥājiz, which was followed directly by the designation of Asadī to the succession. If Ḥājiz died only shortly before 290/903, this places his death at a period when he may be considered as a candidate to have been "last man standing" from among the old guard agents as mentioned by Abū Sahl. Likewise, if Asadī's support for Abū Jaʿfar only came about after he succeeded to Ḥājiz at this time, then this would date this element of Abū Jaʿfar's rise to after the *Tanbīh*. This would explain Abū Sahl's apparent ignorance of Abū Jaʿfar's preeminence in the *Tanbīh*. Abū Jaʿfar's rise probably began before this time, but it would have been unrivalled after the deaths of the last old guard agents like Ḥājiz, though he still had to rely on the support of new generation agents like Asadī. In Abū Sahl's framework, the period after the death of the last agent of the old generation was followed by the era of the "hidden *wakīl*." Was Abū Jaʿfar the hidden *wakīl*? I will return to this question below.

ABŪ ṬĀHIR B. BILĀL (AL-BILĀLĪ), "THE SPLIT" IN THE OCCULTATION FACTION, AND THE PROBLEM OF DELEGATIONISM (*TAFWĪḌ*)

The third agent whose case provides important evidence for the reception of Abū Jaʿfar's leadership is Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bilāl, or al-Bilālī.[76] Abū Ṭāhir initially seems to have accepted the Occultation paradigm, but then rejected the leadership of Abū Jaʿfar. Abū Ṭāhir is associated with an event referred to as "the split." Given the general context of ubiquitous sectarian fission that characterizes this period, for one event in particular to be referred to as "the split" it would have to be a fairly significant milestone. While the reports regarding Abū Ṭāhir certainly indicate a political struggle over Imamic revenues, there is also some evidence that there was a doctrinal dimension to this split, touching upon the question of God's delegation (*tafwīḍ*) of His power to His favored ones.

So, who was Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl? His father was a prominent pre-Occultation figure, and is among those who is counted as having witnessed the hidden Imam.[77] We also have a couple of reports placing Abū Ṭāhir himself in the pre-Occultation period, as an associate of the eleventh

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[76] Usually just called Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī, Ṭūsī does mention his full name as Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bilāl. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 219.

[77] There is a report in which ʿAlī b. Bilāl, presumably Abū Ṭāhir's father, is reported to have been among the group of forty men allowed to witness the child Imam during the lifetime of Ḥasan. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 222. This suggests that ʿAlī b. Bilāl was the prominent agent known as Bilālī immediately prior to the Occultation, and should be identified with the

Imam.[78] One report in Kashshī's *Rijāl* depicts the eleventh Imam as blessing a man referred to as al-Bilālī, saying, "for he is the reliable trustworthy one (*al-thiqa al-maʾmūn*), knowledgeable about what is required of him."[79]

Abū Ṭāhir also can be seen as one of the old guard, appearing in one of the central roles of the old guard agents: affirming the existence of the hidden Imam, by passing on a letter from the eleventh Imam that asserted the existence of the child. He is quoted as saying:

[A letter] was issued to me from Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] two years before his death, telling me of the offspring (*khalaf*) after him. Then [a letter] was issued to me three days after his death, informing me of that:

"May God curse whoever denies God's friends (*awliyāʾ*) their dues (*ḥuqūq*),[80] and carries the people with them.[81]

"Great thanks be to God."[82]

This letter places Abū Ṭāhir among the pro-Occultation faction, as one of those who actively broadcasted the existence of a child Imam born before the eleventh Imam died, in opposition to the claims of Jaʿfar "the Liar" as well as those who claimed that a pregnant concubine bore the Imam's successor. As such, we might expect Abū Ṭāhir to be part of a more-or-less united *nāḥiya* representing the hidden Imam, and opposing Jaʿfar "the Liar." Instead, we see him opposing Abū Jaʿfar.

We get a clearer sense of the implications of "the split" associated with Abū Ṭāhir in Ṭūsī's chapter on "The censured ones who claimed Gatehood." Ṭūsī sums it up as follows:

The story of [Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bilāl] is well-known regarding what occurred between him and Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (may God make his face shine), his seizing of the monies belonging to the Imam which had been in his possession; his preventing of them being handed over; and his claim that

Bilālī referred to in Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list of agents who saw the Imam. (Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442–43.) This older Ibn Bilāl might have been the agent who was praised by Ḥasan.

[78] In it, Abū Ṭāhir writes to Ḥasan to inform him of the large sums of money that another agent, ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar, was spending. Ḥasan's reply expresses his support for ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar, and states that the Imam had, indeed, made large gifts to this agent. The report is noteworthy in its suggestion of his vein of discontent with the institutions of the Imamate. It is noteworthy that this report about Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī was narrated by none other than Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 217.

[79] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:847.

[80] This usually refers to the canonical taxes and Imamic revenues.

[81] Literally, "who carries the people on their shoulders," i.e. who has the responsibility for dragging other people into perdition.

[82] This is a standard sign-off from letters of this period. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 499.

he was the *wakīl*, until the majority group disassociated from him (*barāʾa*), and cursed him, and [the rescript (*tawqīʿ*)] was issued from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) (AS) and things that are well-known.[83]

It is unfortunate that these events were too "well-known" for Ṭūsī to relate, for now we have lost many of the details of the story. However, it fits into a familiar pattern of rivalry between agents. The accusation that Abū Ṭāhir was collecting and keeping money of the Imam recalls the Wāqifī agents going back to the death of Kāẓim, heretics at the time of Hādī and Ḥasan like Fāris b. Ḥātim, and the treacherous supporters of Jaʿfar who collected taxes in his name but refused to hand them over.[84]

One report in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* corroborates the idea that the conflict with Abū Ṭāhir was part of a wider split, with the control of Imamic resources as a key area of dispute:[85]

There was a man from our companions who joined (*inḍawā*) Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl *after the split*. Then he reneged from that and entered into our number, and we asked him about the reason. He said:

I was with Abū Ṭāhir one day, and his brother Abū al-Ṭayyib was with him along with Ibn Khazar and a group of his companions, when a servant (*ghulām*) entered and said, "Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī is at the door." The group were all frightened because of that and denied him [entry] as a few moments went by.

Then [Abū Ṭāhir] said, "[Let him] enter."

Abū Jaʿfar (RAA) entered and Abū Ṭāhir and the group stood for him, and he sat at the head of the gathering and Abū Ṭāhir sat like someone sitting in audience before him, and [Abū Jaʿfar] waited until they quietened down, then he said, "O Abū Ṭāhir, I adjure you by God, did not the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) order you to carry the money in your possession to me?"

[Abū Ṭāhir] replied, "Yes, by God."

Abū Jaʿfar (RAA) stood to depart and a silence fell upon the people, and when he left them his brother Abū al-Ṭayyib said: "From where did you see the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*)?"

Abū Ṭāhir replied, "Abū Jaʿfar made me enter one of his houses and [the Imam] appeared high above at a high point in his house, and ordered me to transport what was in my possession to him."

Abū al-Ṭayyib said, "And how did you know that he was the Lord of the Age (AS)?" He said, "Fear of him fell upon me and awe toward him entered me from which I knew that he was the Lord of the Age (AS)."

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[83] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248.   [84] See previous chapters.
[85] The report is transmitted from a man called Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Muʿādhī, by Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī, an ally of the third envoy, Ibn Rawḥ (see Chapter 6).

And that was the reason for my cutting myself off from [Abū Ṭāhir].[86]

This report shows clear signs of its apologetic function to undermine the dangers implicit in Abū Ṭāhir's counterclaims: Abū Ṭāhir is improbably made to condemn himself. It seems unlikely that Abū Ṭāhir would really have admitted before his followers that the hidden Imam had ordered him to send money to Abū Jaʿfar. Nonetheless, the narrative is instructive in its dramatization of the split between the followers of Abū Jaʿfar and Abū Ṭāhir. The split appears from this report to have revolved around control of the community finances as a vehicle for the recognition of legitimate Imamic authority. The initial statement that, "there was a man from our companions who joined Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl after the split" gives a sense that the split between the followers of Abū Jaʿfar and Abū Ṭāhir was a recognized historical moment that was defining for the community at this stage. No clear clues toward dating the split are provided, but given Abū Ṭāhir's status as an old guard agent, it must have occurred in the transition between the old guard and the new generation.

No doctrinal contention appears in the above report, and indeed, Abū Ṭāhir admits to the existence of the hidden Imam. Was there no doctrinal dimension to this split, then? On the contrary: although, as we have seen, financial concerns were clearly a crucial aspect of the conflict with Abū Ṭāhir and the wider split, we also have two reports which, when read together, clearly indicate a doctrinal dimension, related to the question of God's delegation. One of these reports, quoted by Ṭūsī, gives details about the nature of the dispute over delegation:

The sect (*jamāʿa*) differed over whether God delegated (*fawwaḍa*) to the Imams (SAA) to create and sustain. One group said, "This is impossible. [Such delegation] is not possible for God (T) because bodies cannot create themselves, only God (AJ)."

While others said, "But indeed God empowered the Imams to do that and delegated them and they created and sustained." So, they quarreled intensely about that.

Then someone said, "What is wrong with you? Why don't you refer this to Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān and ask him about that so that he can clarify the truth about it for you, for he is the path to the Lord of the Affair (*ṣāḥib al-amr*) (may God speed his delivery)?" And the sect (*jamāʿa*) was satisfied with Abū Jaʿfar and calmed down and responded to his suggestion. And they wrote down the question (*masʾala*) and sent it to him and a rescript was issued to them in response from his side, which I have copied out:

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[86] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248–49 (emphasis added).

"It is God who created bodies and distributed sustenance because He is not a body and nor a state (*ḥāl*) in a body, 'Nothing is like unto Him, and He is Hearing, Knowing' [Q 42:11]. And as for the Imams (AS) they ask God (T) and He creates and sustains as an answer to their requests and as an exaltation of their rights."[87]

This is an intriguing account. It depicts Abū Jaʿfar's Imamic mediation not as a top-down command structure for governing the community, but rather as an authoritative source which can be called upon to arbitrate disputes when needed. The request for clarification in the controversy over whether God delegates His authority to the Imams is responded to with a diplomatic compromise between the delegationists and the anti-delegationists. It suggests that yes, the Imams did, in effect, have access to divine power, but that this power was not theirs, but rather was based on God answering their prayers. This suggests that Abū Jaʿfar, while not exercising strong centralizing authority, was nonetheless attempted to hold conflicting wings of the community together, in the face of the centrifugal forces unleashed by the collapse of the manifest Imamate. The statement is interesting in its clear participation in the theological debates of the day, indicating that it was clearly informed by theological experts associated with the *nāḥiya*, though not necessarily Abū Jaʿfar himself.[88]

Abū Ṭāhir, too, appears to have been involved in the question of delegationism which seems to form part of the background to "the split," as we see in a report transmitted by Ṭūsī:

Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿUbayd Allāh transmitted from Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Sufyān al-Bazūfarī from al-Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ, who said: Our companions differed about *tafwīḍ* and other things, and I went to Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl in the days of his uprightness (*ayyām istiqāmatihi*) and I informed him of the split, and he said, "Give me some time."

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[87] Ibid., 185.

[88] While perhaps representing a certain compromise, it does not refrain from drawing clear theological lines; for example, by stating clearly that God is not a body, in contrast to Hishām b. Ḥakam's earlier, but by now largely obsolete argumentation about what kind of being God has. Wilferd Madelung, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam," *EI2*. The statement represents part of the steady turn away from the anthropomorphism which seems to have characterized early Imami theologians like Muʾmin al-Ṭāq in the second/ninth century, but was successively repudiated, first by contemporary theologians like Hishām b. Ḥakam (who, however, still acknowledged that God was possessed, in some sense, a kind of body (*jism*)) and yet more forthrightly by those Imami theologians who were influenced by Muʿtazili dogma. See Wilferd Madelung, "Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology," in *Le Shîʿisme imâmite. Colloque de Strasbourg (6–9 mai 1968)*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), 13–29.

So, I delayed a few days, then I returned to him, and he issued a hadith for me with its *isnād* reaching to Abū ʿAbd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] (AS): He said:

If [God] wanted something He would present it to the Prophet of God (SAAS), then the Commander of the Faithful [ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib] (AS), [and the rest of the Imams][89] one by one until He reaches the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*), then it emerges into the world, and if the angels want to raise a deed to God (AJ)[90] they present it to the Lord of the Age (AS), then it goes up one by one until he presents it to God's Prophet, then he presents it to God (AJ), and what descends from God is in their hands, and what ascends to God, that is in their hands, and there is not even a blink of an eye in which they are self-sufficient or independent of God.[91]

This report again suggests a doctrinal basis for the split in the Occultation faction associated with Abū Ṭāhir. Here, however, Abū Ṭāhir is depicted as giving sound doctrinal information "in the days of his uprightness." The hadith that he cites supports what we might call a moderate form of *tafwīḍ*, or cosmic delegation from God to the Imams.[92] In this sense, it echoes the statement from Abū Jaʿfar, above, which appears to strike a balance between delegationists and anti-delegationists. It is important here that the hadith is transmitted by Ibn Rawḥ, indicating the agreement on an orthodox position between the two envoys. This moderate delegationism would tend to give support to claims for ongoing Imamic authority represented by the agents of the hidden Imam who is explicitly included in the chain of command going up to the Prophet and God. Likewise, it articulates opposition, for example, to contemporary groups who argued that the current era was a temporary interval in the sequence of the Imamate, but also against groups who argued for a less hierarchical (and perhaps therefore less bureaucratic?) charismatic conception of Gatehood. Abū Ṭāhir's report shows that the Imam represents an intrinsic, necessary stage in the hierarchical functioning of the cosmos. This model of cosmic hierarchy recalls other Imami proofs for the function of the Imamate, including one in which the Imams are referred to as God's envoys (*sufarāʾ*) for carrying communications between God and mankind.[93] Meanwhile, the report stops short of more complete forms of delegationism, such as those represented in the *Book of Shadows* and the cluster of associated "*ghulāt*" texts analyzed by Mushegh Asatryan, which were ultimately

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[89] Here I am following the editorial comment in the edition of Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* edited by ʿAbbad Allāh Ṭihrānī and ʿAlī Aḥmad Naṣiḥ (Qumm: Muʾassasat al-maʿārif al-islāmiyya, 1411/1991), 387.

[90] Presumably in order to record the deeds of men in order to account for them toward judgment.

[91] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 241.   [92] See Modarressi on *tafwīḍ*. *Crisis*, 19–51.

[93] Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:168.

designated as beyond the pale for Twelvers.[94] The events in this report purport to date from before the time of crisis toward the end of the third/ninth century, before Abū Ṭāhir's ultimate decision to split from the ʿAmrīs and the agents that supported them. Nonetheless, in spite of the political split that ensued, Ibn Rawḥ's transmission of this report suggests that its moderate delegationism continued to be used by Ibn Rawḥ later as a means of providing a theological underpinning to the authority of the envoys. As for the nature of Abū Ṭāhir's opposition to Abū Jaʿfar, the mention of the "days of his uprightness" suggest that Abū Ṭāhir may have dabbled with some kind of doctrinal heterodoxy later, but we cannot be sure what kind. Did Abū Ṭāhir dabble in more complete delegationism? It seems unlikely, as no clear accusations are made, and in the Abū Ṭāhir narratives there is a conspicuous absence of terms for heterodoxy such as *ghuluww*, *ṭaʿn*, *ikhtilāṭ*, and so on. It seems unlikely that Abū Ṭāhir's opponents would not have exploited such deviations to tar him with had they existed.

The case of Abū Ṭāhir, then, provides an example of a conflict between Abū Jaʿfar and an old guard agent who doubted him, which had a politico-financial dimension and, apparently, a connection to a wider controversy over God's delegation of power to the Imams. Yet there are pieces of the puzzle missing. No clear evidence exists to suggest that Abū Ṭāhir's doctrines were beyond the pale as in the later case of Shalmaghānī. Instead, Ṭūsī's placing of Abū Ṭāhir into the category of those who claimed Gatehood must be seen as a strategic, retrospective lumping together of various threats to Abū Jaʿfar and the other envoys, both political and doctrinal.

CHARISMATIC CHANNELS OF LEGITIMATION: THE HIDDEN *BĀB* OF THE HIDDEN IMAM AND THE SENSATION OF CONTACT

While it is commonplace to assert a fundamental split between "orthodox" Imamis and *ghulāt* "exaggerators," the creation of a Twelver orthodoxy relied upon the incorporation of themes and structures previously associated with the *ghulāt*: most notably the idea of Occultation itself, but also, crucially, the charismatic role of the *bāb* as mediator for the unseen, divine forces in the cosmos.[95] Abū Jaʿfar's rise must be understood as emerging

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[94] Asatryan, *Controversies*. In these works God's favored servants are depicted as creating and governing the world on His behalf.

[95] Asatryan states that *bāb* was not specifically a *ghulāt* idea, but he does not systematically provide evidence for this claim. The evidence he does provide suggests that Muḥammad or

within the context of several comparable figures competing, claiming to be mediators for Imamic and therefore divine guidance. Even before the crisis of the death of Ḥasan, *bābī* claims to represent divine guidance had been coming to the fore, and these claims were probably encouraged by the absence of strong leaders from the lineage of the Imams. New times required new measures and led to the evolution of new forms of authority. The crisis of Imamic absence that had been felt even during the Imamate of Hādī[96] had as its corollary the rise in non-Imamic actors claiming their own independent source of divinely sanctioned authority that had a tenuous connection with the direct commands of the Imam himself. Abū Jaʿfar's rise to the role of envoy echoes this broader rise of non-Imamic authority to fill the vacuum of leadership created by an absent Imam. While the envoys are remembered by Twelver posterity and recent scholarship as bastions against the tide of doctrinally "extreme" *ghulāt*, especially Ibn Rawḥ in his struggles against Shalmaghānī,[97] the actual picture emerging from the narrative sources is more nuanced. As Abū Ṭāhir's moderate delegationism indicates, there were efforts to strike a balance between the idea of a mundane Imam, and a more supernaturally imbued figure which might imbue the Imamic institutions of the Occultation with more powerful authority.[98] To the extent that Abū Jaʿfar represented this latter charismatic kind of authority, we can see him competing on similar terrain with his more "heterodox" rivals. These rival *bāb*s seem to have relied upon an esoteric conception of authority based on processes of personal initiation into the secrets of the Imamate,[99] as opposed to the agents' more institutionally embedded bureaucratic conception of authority focused on letters and revenues. In more

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ʿAlī were the first to be considered the Gates for God, therefore not intrinsically suggesting a *ghulāt* framework. *Controversies*, 81. However, the archetypal *bāb*, and one who is of surpassing significance for the *ghulāt*, is arguably the figure of Salmān al-Fārisī. Further study of the historical instances of the use of Salmān as *bāb* might illuminate the development of the language of Gatehood to leaders of non-prophetic and non-Imamic lineage, and the construction of the *bāb* within a gnostic-*ghulātī* attitude to the esoteric dimension to apparent events, which allows a non-Imamic *bāb* to fulfill a similar cosmological and practical leadership function as an Imam or prophet.

[96] See Chapter 2; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 267; Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, 286.

[97] See Arjomand, "Crisis," 507–9.

[98] For support for the idea of the Imam as a more mundane scholar, see Bayhom-Daou, "The Imam's Knowledge."

[99] This is rather speculative, but the hints we have about the interpretation of rituals mandated by Islamic law like prayer and pilgrimage as standing for historical persons seem to suggest this kind of initiatic dimension of interpretive milieu structured around the mediation of hidden knowledge by a single charismatic leader.

bābī conceptions, divine guidance was understood as being vested directly in the *bāb*, albeit with the idea of the hidden Imam's authority as a foundation. Even Ṭūsī's categorical separation between praised envoys and censured *bāb*s indicates the similarity of the kind of authority that they were claiming: separated mainly by the praise and blame of their claims. The inflation of the role of agent to something with a greater religious significance was an almost inevitable result of the acceptance of the Occultation doctrine: as soon as a hidden Imam is acknowledged, his designated representatives must take on the responsibility of acting in a quasi-Imamic capacity, to indicate the reality of Imamic guidance.[100] While Abū Jaʿfar's authority was partly predicated upon his links to the institutions of the fiscal network of the dead Imam, this alone was not enough. He needed to provide a charismatic sense of contact to cosmological frameworks of divine guidance. Thus, we can understand Abū Jaʿfar as drawing on two distinct genealogies of sub-Imamic authority: the bureaucratic paradigm of the fiscal agent (*wakīl*); and the charismatic paradigm of the Gate (*bāb*) who embodies divine Imamic guidance more directly, drawing upon esoteric genealogies of divine incarnation or theophany in human leaders.[101]

An important, but hitherto neglected story in the *bābī*-Twelver text, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, by Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī, provides the most explicit placement of Abū Jaʿfar within a framework of representation that is comparable to his charismatic rivals to the position of *bāb*. This report is also noteworthy in that it recalls Abū Sahl's peculiar suggestion that the last of the old guard agents passed his authority to a *bāb* of the hidden Imam, who was one of several hidden reliable agents of the Imam.[102]

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[100] The quasi-Imamic activity of the de facto leader has been formalized in another Shiʿi community with a hidden Imam, the Ismaili Bohras, in which the community leader, the *dāʿī muṭlaq*, is technically understood to be "quasi-infallible" (*ka-l-maʿṣūm*). That is, the representative of the Imam takes on Imamic authority for practical purposes, but stops short of full investiture with the Imamic prerogative of infallibility or impeccability. Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159, 362.

[101] Given the importance of the hero of the esoterists, Salmān al-Fārisī, as the archetypal *bāb*, the idea of the *bāb*, like the idea of Occultation itself, hitherto had probably circulated primarily among those dismissed at the time as *ghulāt*. For Occultation and *rajʿa* as ideas associated with the word *ghuluww*, see Wadād al-Qāḍī, "The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya," in *Shiʿism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 169–83.

[102] Abū Sahl complicates the picture by noting the hidden agent is one of *several* hidden reliables of the Imam operating at the time. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93. This suggests that the early *nāḥiya* had been operating or was currently operating secretly. See also

Other than this, I have only been able to identify the idea of a hidden or secretly operating *wakīl* or *bāb* in one other report, cited in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*.[103] The story in the *Dalāʾil* is told by a certain Aḥmad from Dīnawar who, in a significant divergence from the familiar tropes of the early Occultation, says that he doubted the identity of the Imam's representative, rather than the Imam himself. The report begins with a typical Occultation-era trope:

I departed from Ardabīl to al-Dīnawar, wishing to make Ḥajj, and this was a year or two after the passing of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī] (AS), and the people were in perplexity (*ḥayra*). The people of al-Dīnawar welcomed my arrival, and the Shiʿa gathered at my place, and they said, "We have gathered in our possession 60,000 dinars from the money of the followers (*mawālī*), and we require you to carry it with you and deliver it to the person to whom delivery (*taslīm*) is obligatory." . . .

I said, "O people, this is perplexity (*ḥayra*). We do not know the *bāb* in this time!"[104]

This response diverges from the usual tropes of the early Occultation era in that the direct cause of perplexity is the obscure identity of the Imam's *bāb*, rather than the Imam himself.

   Aḥmad from Dīnawar agrees to carry the money and to attempt to find the Imam's representative, here using the word "deputy" (indicating perhaps a late, Twelver usage) as synonymous with the *bāb* he had mentioned previously:

When I reached Baghdad, I had no concern but to search for the one who was indicated for the office of deputy (ʿamman ushīra ilayhi bi-l-niyāba).[105]

And it was said to me: "There is a man known as al-Bāqiṭānī who claims the deputyship (*niyāba*). And another known as Isḥāq al-Aḥmar claims deputyship, and another known as Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī claims deputyship."[106]

Again, this diverges from the more standard Twelver narratives favored by Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī as it places the choice of Abū Jaʿfar within the context of a number of possible candidates, notably the *ghulāt* claimant Isḥāq al-Aḥmar,

   Ghaemmaghami for the persistence of the idea of a group of hidden companions of the hidden Imam in later centuries. *Encounters*, 85–132.
[103] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.   [104] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 519–20.
[105] The use of the term *niyāba* is uncommon in the earliest reports, the only comparison being one of the Qummī delegation narratives quoted by Ibn Bābūya which indicates that after the hidden Imam could be reached in Samarra, he was later to be accessed through his "*nuwwāb*" in Baghdad. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 478–79.
[106] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 520.

who is also recorded as contesting authority with Ibn Nuṣayr.[107] The descriptions of the claimants to the deputyship of the Imam have clearly been made to fit literary archetypes, but it is possible that they may also contain the memory of relative ages and social stations:

He said: So, I started with al-Bāqiṭānī, and I went to him, and I found him to be a handsome old man (*shaykh bahī*), who had obvious manly virtue (*murūʾa ẓāhira*),[108] an Arabian mare, and many servants, around whom were gathered people debating (*yatanāẓarūn*).[109]

Bāqiṭānī is asked for a proof, but is unable to produce one, and so Aḥmad from Dīnawar goes on to Isḥāq al-Aḥmar:[110]

He said: So, I went to Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, and I found him to be a clean youth (*shābb naẓīf*), whose house (*manzil*) was larger than the house of al-Bāqiṭānī, and his horses and his clothes and his manly virtue (*murūʾa*) were yet nobler (*asrā*), and his servants were more numerous than the other's servants, and more people gathered by him than gathered at al-Bāqiṭānī's.[111]

But Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, too, is unable to provide a proof, and Aḥmad proceeds to the third possible *bāb*:

He said: Then I went to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, and I found him to be a humble old man (*shaykh mutawāḍiʿ*), wearing a white waist-wrapper[112] sitting on a felt mat[113] in a small house, without the servants, the manly virtue (*murūʾa*), or horses which I found with the others.

He said: So, I greeted him and he returned my answer, and approached me and he opened his arms to me. Then he asked me about my state and I informed him that I had arrived from the Jabal [in north-central Iran], transporting money.

He said: So [Abū Jaʿfar] said, "If you wish to deliver this thing to whom it is necessary to deliver it, then you must go out to Samarra and ask at the house of Ibn al-Riḍā [i.e. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī] and ask about so-and-so son of so-and-so,[114] the *wakīl*. And the house of Ibn al-Riḍā is inhabited by its people (*ʿāmira bi-ahlihā*) and there you will find what you are looking for."

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[107] See Mushegh Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmar Naḵaʿi," *EIr.*

[108] This is a difficult term to translate. It has clear links to ideas of virtue and manliness, but here seems to be connected also to the material trappings of a rich household, along with servants and clothes.

[109] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 520.   [110] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 478–79.

[111] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 521.   [112] The word is obscure: M-B-Ṭ-N-(H).

[113] Arabic: *libd*.

[114] This suggests that the name was mentioned in the original conversation, but it was omitted from transmission at some point, perhaps suggesting that, like the hidden Imam, this agent was in danger and had to remain anonymous for that reason.

He said: So, I went from him, and I headed toward Samarra, and I headed on to the house of Ibn al-Riḍā. And I asked about the agent. And the doorkeeper (*bawwāb*)[115] noted that he was occupied in the house, and that he would come out soon, so I sat by the door, waiting for him to come out, and he came out after a moment and I stood and greeted him and he took me by the hand to a house that belonged to him, and he asked me about my state, and about what I had to deliver to him and I informed him that I carried some of the money of the region of the Jabal, and I needed to hand it over to him upon a proof (*ḥujja*).

He said: And he said, "Yes." Then he offered me food and said to me, "Dine upon this and take your ease, for you are tired, and there is a little while between us and the first prayer (*ṣalāt al-ūlā*)." And I will bring to you what you want.

He said: So I ate and slept, and when it was the time for prayer, I rose and prayed and I went to the watering fountain (*mashraʿa*) and I washed and I returned to the house of the man, and I tarried until a quarter of the night had passed and he came to me, and he had with him a scroll, in which was [written]:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawarī has arrived carrying 16,000 dinars, in such and such number of purses, among which is the purse of so-and-so son of so-and-so, with such and such number of dinars; and the purse of so-and-so son of so-and-so, with such and such dinars" – until he had accounted for the purses, all of them. . . .

He said: So, I praised God and I thanked him for the blessing he had granted me through banishing doubt from my heart. And [the *wakīl*] ordered me to hand over all of what I had carried to wherever Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī ordered me to.

He said: So, I returned to Baghdad, and I went to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī.

He said: And my going out and my return took three days.

He said: And when Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī looked at me, he said to me, "Why have you not set out?"

And I said, "O my *sayyid*, I have returned from Samarra!"

He said: And I spoke with Abū Jaʿfar about this. Sure enough, a note (*ruqʿa*) arrived for Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī from our Master (*mawlā*) (SAA) and with it was a scroll like the scroll which I had with me, in which was the mention of the money and the cloths, and he [the Imam] ordered that [Abū Jaʿfar] should hand over all of that to Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī. And Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī put on his clothes, and he said to me, "Carry what is with you to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī."

He said: And I carried the money and the cloths to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān, and I handed them over, and I went out on Ḥajj.[116]

[115] Here it seems to be the servant who opens the door, rather than the Gate to the Imam, as elsewhere in the *Dalāʾil*.
[116] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 521–23.

This long and elaborate narrative is remarkable in the relationship it presents between Abū Jaʿfar and another, more centrally positioned agent. This unnamed agent appears secretly operating out of the house of the dead Imam, apparently supported by the household servant who answers the door.[117] He does not operate openly. Rather than carrying out the business of the *nāḥiya* in the house of the Imam, he brings Aḥmad the Dīnawarī to "a house belonging to him." However, the agent does not receive the money himself, but rather indicates it should be distributed according to Abū Jaʿfar's instructions. Thus, this anonymous agent ultimately functions in this narrative to indicate the legitimacy of Abū Jaʿfar, against other potential claimants. This, then, seems to depict Abū Jaʿfar as part of a legitimate hierarchy leading up to a hidden agent or *bāb*, based in Samarra, who maintained a connection with the deceased Imam's house, and claimed direct contact with the Imam. We can see this dynamic also in one other report in which Abū Jaʿfar is depicted as forwarding money to an anonymous agent in Samarra, while he operates in Baghdad.[118] The report about the hidden agent in *Dalāʾil al-imāma* suggests that "the *Wakīl*" was not Abū Jaʿfar himself, but rather someone based in Samarra with whom Abū Jaʿfar maintained contact. Who "the *Wakīl*" was in this model remains obscure: perhaps another named agent or servant like Badr the eunuch, Ḥājiz, or Aḥmad b. Isḥāq. Given Ibn Rustum's favor for Aḥmad b. Isḥāq elsewhere, we might conclude the latter. However, it is probably a mistake to attempt to reconcile all accounts too closely. Of all early Occultation narrative reports, it is Ibn Rustum's here which most closely echoes Abū Sahl's elliptical comments about the succession to authority of a hidden intermediary who was operating in concert with a group of hidden reliable agents (*thiqāt*).[119] The dating does not match, however: Abū Sahl's hidden man succeeded to authority upon the death of the last agent of the old guard, while Ibn Rustum's report is said to have occurred just a couple of years after Ḥasan's death. Ultimately, we must accept that alternative frameworks were developed to invest different figures with authority, and that while they must have been based in a sequence of historical

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[117] There are clear resonances here with the servant-archetypes who appear in other early Occultation narratives as crucial transitional figures in transmitting the authority of the Imams.

[118] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

[119] "Then [the man] bequeathed [his responsibility] to a hidden man from the Shiʿa who took up [the man's] position in the leadership (*amr*) of this [community]" (*wa-awṣā ilā rajulin min al-shīʿa mastūrin fa-qāma maqāmahu fī hādhā al-amr*). Ibid., 88.

contestations, they were elaborated both contemporaneously and there-
after, generating irreconcilable contradictions.

RIVAL *BĀB*S

Ibn Rustum's hidden agent report in the *Dalāʾil* depicts a contest between
three *bāb*s, including Abū Jaʿfar, a *ghulāt* leader named Isḥāq "the Red"
(*al-aḥmar*), who died in 286/899,[120] and the ʿAbbasid bureaucrat Bāqiṭānī.
It is interesting to note how each of these three claimants seems to be
evaluated rather even-handedly. The *Dalāʾil* is itself a doctrinally *bābī*
source,[121] but nonetheless, it is striking that Isḥāq the Red and Bāqiṭānī
are not named as heretics or traitors, especially given that Isḥāq the Red is
named as a heretic by Twelver orthodoxy. Instead, it is simply suggested
that they were just not so pious and ascetic as Abū Jaʿfar, and therefore
their claims were not preferred. Assessing the *Dalāʾil*'s vision of the
relationship between Abū Jaʿfar and similar claimants returns us to the pre-
Occultation struggles of Imam Hādī to counteract independent claimants
to divine guidance. Hādī's weakness was probably exacerbated by his
immobility, lack of coercive power, and his isolation from his followers.
Now, with the total disappearance of the Imam, various *bābī* figures were
increasingly able to assert their claims in a mixed "marketplace of ideas" in
which ideas and individuals could compete relatively freely. The extent to
which this was an even playing field, was, it is true, still limited both by the
residual institutions of the Imamate through which Abū Jaʿfar was making
his claims, and, perhaps more importantly, by the epistemic conservatism
of the transmitters of Imamic hadith, who significantly defined the repre-
sentation of the Imamate.

The Twelvers eventually demarcated themselves as separate from
groups like the Nuṣayrīs and the Isḥāqiyya, but in the first decades of the
Occultation, there was a common process of theorization, articulation,
and contention that suggests that such groups collaborated in the debate
about the nature of the era of Occultation. The clearest example of this
comes in the final section of Khaṣībī's *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*. While this

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[120] "He lived and worked above all in Baghdad, where he died in 286/899. The community of
Isḥāqīs named after him is attested to in Baghdad and al-Madāʾin." Halm, *Gnosis*, 278.
See also Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmar Nakhāʾi," *EIr*; Mushegh Asatryan, "Shiʿi Literature in
the Late 9th Century: Isḥāq al-Aḥmar al-Nakhāʾī and His Writings," in *Light upon Light:
Essays in Islamic Thought and History in Honor of Gerhard Bowering*, ed. Jamal Elias and
Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 164–81.
[121] See Chapter 4.

section does not appear to belong to the structure of the original work, and therefore may not be Khaṣībī's own,[122] it does show how the Gatehood of Ibn Nuṣayr could be reconciled with the agentship of Abū Jaʿfar, by insisting that the concept of agent responsible for money is different from the spiritual-cosmological role of the *bāb*, a position claimed for Ibn Nuṣayr alone in this period. In this report Imam Ḥasan states: "ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, the Oil Merchant, is my agent, and his son Muḥammad is the agent of my son, the Mahdī."[123] In another report I have already referred to, Khaṣībī appears to engineer an even more complete reconciliation between proto-Nuṣayrī canons and the agents, as Abū Jaʿfar appears as the "son" and therefore successor to Ibn Nuṣayr after the death of the mother of Ḥasan,[124] perhaps implying that someone had understood Abū Jaʿfar to be part of the initiatic hierarchy of Gatehood, although this appears to have been a minority position, even for proto-Nuṣayrīs.

When the Nuṣayrīs articulated an argument against the idea of Abū Jaʿfar being a divinely infused *bāb*, it must have been because such arguments were being made by others. If this is correct, then it appears that there was no clear boundary between pro-envoy elements within the community and *ghulāt* elements,[125] but rather there was a complex negotiation among both exoterically and esoterically oriented members of the community, regarding both the identity and the nature of leadership in this new period. The evidence from Khaṣībī and Ibn Rustum's *Dalāʾil* analyzed above clearly shows Abū Jaʿfar's appeal as an authority figure for those of a *bābī* or *ghulāt* orientation. Abū Jaʿfar's success may therefore owe something to his ability to win over adherents of multiple different orientations. His claim was certainly rooted in his position within Imamic institutions, but his appeal seems to have gone beyond the inheritance of mere bureaucratic authority, perhaps because on purely bureaucratic grounds, his claim to have been appointed as agent was considered

[122] The addition of the chapter of the agents seems very much an afterthought to the twelve parallel chapters of Imams' *bāb*s.

[123] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 394–95. This report provides yet another example in which the traditional conception of the four Occultation-era envoys is undermined, as it limits ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd's role to agentship during the pre-Occultation Imamate of Ḥasan.

[124] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276.

[125] Asatryan, conversely, seems to suggest that the cause of tensions between *ghulāt* and *muqaṣṣira* over doctrine and the authority of *bābī* representation at this time was the absence of the Imam and the rise of the Occultation doctrine, championed by the envoys. *Controversies*, 80–81. However, as we have seen, Hādī's difficulties with *bāb*s began before the Occultation.

inconclusive by the likes of Aḥmad b. Hilāl. Abū Jaʿfar needed to appeal to
something beyond regular agentship.

The retrospective reconciliation between the claims of Abū Jaʿfar and
Ibn Nuṣayr seems to have been achieved in spite of evidence of contem-
porary political tensions between them. Although Ibn Nuṣayr's claims to
authority first began in the pre-Occultation period (he claimed to be
a "prophet" during the Imamate of Hādī),[126] Ṭūsī transmits a report that
Abū Jaʿfar cursed Ibn Nuṣayr:

Abū Ṭālib al-Anbārī said: When Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr emerged with his mission
(*zahara bi-mā zahara*), Abū Jaʿfar (RAA) cursed him and disassociated from him
(*barāʾa*), and that reached him [Ibn Nuṣayr] and he set out toward Abū Jaʿfar to win
over his heart or apologize to him, but Abū Jaʿfar did not permit him but prevented
him entering into his audience (*ḥajabahu*) and rejected him as deceived (*khāʾib*).[127]

As so often, the language here is maddeningly unspecific, and we cannot be
sure what motivated the act of cursing. Given that Ibn Nuṣayr is depicted
as attempting to win Abū Jaʿfar's approval, his crime might be read as
being doctrinal heterodoxy, rather than a direct challenge to Abū Jaʿfar's
authority, and this would perhaps render the compromise found in
Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* intelligible. If Ṭūsī had provided a date, it would have
helped, but as it is, we are left with a general sense that it must have
happened around the same time as the hidden agent report in the
Dalāʾil, which is dated to around 261–62/875–76. This dating seems to
be corroborated by Khaṣībī's report implying that Ḥudayth inherited
leadership from Ibn Nuṣayr, for if Ibn Nuṣayr predeceased Ḥudayth, this
would suggest that Ibn Nuṣayr died only a few years after Ḥasan.[128]

In addition to the Twelver orthodoxy represented by Ṭūsī, and the
Nuṣayrī compromise reported by Khaṣībī, we also see another kind of

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126 *Pace* Asatryan who states merely that Ibn Nuṣayr "lived during the lifetime of the eleventh
     Imam and advanced a claim to be his *bāb* after his death." *Controversies*, 81. In Kashshī's
     Rijāl (2:805), Nawbakhti's *Firaq* (78), and Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī's *Maqālāt* (100)
     whose testimony is almost identical, Ibn Nuṣayr claimed to be a prophet (*nabī*) *during* the
     Imamate of Hādī, and espoused *ghuluww* regarding al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, perhaps suggest-
     ing he divinized the eleventh Imam. These sources do not clearly state that he claimed to
     be the Imam's *bāb*. In certain texts, Ibn Nuṣayr claimed that he was directly God's *bāb*,
     and in general the position of *bāb* seems to have been magnified at the expense of other
     divine hypostases which might have represented the Imam himself, such as the *maʿnā* and
     the *ism*. This might explain why the Imami heresiographers portrayed him as presenting
     himself as a prophet.
127 Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 247.
128 This report is, however, extremely elliptical. See above, Chapter 4, and Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*,
     276.

Twelver *bābī* vision in the *Dalāʾil*, which claims that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was the *bāb*[129] of the tenth and eleventh Imams.[130] Thus, we see an (admittedly rather anomalous) Twelver source supporting the ʿAmrī claim to provide a more charismatic type of direct mediation of Imamic authority, while the Nuṣayrī text acknowledges only the fiscal-institutional role of the envoys as agents of the Imams, reserving spiritual authority for Ibn Nuṣayr. Thus, the *Dalāʾil* may represent the kind of Twelver that Khaṣībī is responding to: attempting to inflate the spiritual role of the envoys at the expense of his own *bāb*, Ibn Nuṣayr.

It is a little harder to understand the role of Isḥāq the Red and Bāqiṭānī in the *Dalāʾil*, but we have no reason to suspect Abū Jaʿfar's rivalry with these figures. Isḥāq the Red was a *ghālī* and head of the ʿAlyāʾiyya[131] of his time, and he therefore closely resembled Ibn Nuṣayr in broad doctrinal tendencies. Asatryan notes that passages in his extant writings resemble ideas of *tafwīḍ*: with Muḥammad as God's servant, creating the world on His behalf, which is suggestive given "the split" over delegationism at this time.[132] There are clear indications of tension between Isḥāq's followers and both the Twelvers and the Nuṣayrīs. For the Nuṣayrīs, Isḥāq the Red seems to have posed a threat as a rival to Ibn Nuṣayr for the station of *bāb*,[133] and Nuṣayrī literature contains many references denigrating Isḥāq the Red in comparison to the superior knowledge of Ibn Nuṣayr. After Ibn Nuṣayr's death, his followers must have continued to reject Isḥāq the Red. Under Khaṣībī's guidance, they continued to be part of a broader twelver movement in that the Nuṣayrīs continued to accept the hidden twelfth Imam. As for Isḥāq the Red and his followers, neither Halm nor Asatryan mention whether they accepted the existence of a hidden twelfth Imam.[134]

As for Bāqiṭānī, we know of an Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Bāqiṭānī, an important official in the caliphal administration, a Muʿtazili and a prominent Shiʿi, who patronized the poet Ibn al-Rūmī as did Abū Sahl.[135] This is presumably the same Bāqiṭānī that Ṭūsī depicts as receiving

[129] As mentioned above, the printed edition uses the word *bawwāb*.
[130] Ibn Rustum, *Dalāʾil*, 411, 425.
[131] A sect ascribing divinity to ʿAlī. This tradition gave prominent place to the idea of *bāb* as participating in the divine essence of the Imam. However, the Isḥāqīs and the Nuṣayrīs followed different leaders and became bitter rivals. Halm, *Gnosis*, 278–79; Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmad Naḵaʾi," *EIr*.
[132] Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmad Naḵaʾi," *EIr*.
[133] See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 9–10; Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmad Naḵaʾi," *EIr*.
[134] Halm *Gnosis*, 278–79; Asatryan, "Esḥāq Aḥmad Naḵaʾi," *EIr*.
[135] See Robert McKinney, *The Case of Rhyme versus Reason: Ibn al-Rūmī and His Poetics in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 10.

a special warning from the vizier (probably Ibn Bulbul) not to visit the shrines of the Quraysh, as the caliph was arresting such pilgrims, presumably as a way of cracking down on the Shiʿa.[136] If it is true that this same Bāqiṭānī was acting as a *bāb* as suggested in the *Dalāʾil*, this would indeed be noteworthy, giving further hints of the importance of connections to political power in establishing claims to authority within the Imami community. However, I have found no further evidence of Bāqiṭānī's *bāb*-like activities. Interestingly enough, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Bāqiṭānī is mentioned as having been present upon the death of Abū Jaʿfar, and giving his allegiance to Ibn Rawḥ along with other Shiʿi notables and bureaucrats,[137] suggesting that, whatever the initial rivalry between him and Abū Jaʿfar, these differences were eventually resolved, with Bāqiṭānī giving his allegiance to Abū Jaʿfar in the interests of unity.[138]

It is not possible, then, to draw a clear line between Twelver and *ghulāt* political claims.[139] There were *ghulāt* who accepted Abū Jaʿfar, and non-*ghulāt* who opposed him. At the level of theology, of course, there could be deep differences in the interpretation of the cosmological role of the *bāb*s, which did not necessarily have to overlap cleanly with political affiliation. For the Nuṣayrīs and groups of similar orientation, the *bāb* was not just a representative of the Imam, but a hypostasis of Imamic divinity.[140] This doctrinal difference is important: it shows that the very word *bāb* meant very different things to different people. The ability of a single word to encompass numerous, potentially contradictory meanings also suggests that it was not necessary for all of Abū Jaʿfar's supporters to see eye to eye on doctrine, if they acceded to his political authority.

MECHANISMS OF REPRESENTATION: BETWEEN BUREAUCRACY AND CHARISMA

Various elements of Abū Jaʿfar's program are visible from our sources, to the extent that we might begin to talk of his "policy" during this period. Abū Jaʿfar came to be recognized as a canonical envoy not only due to a certain success in mobilizing political support, but also due to the

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[136] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 178.

[137] See Chapter 6 for this and various other examples of links between Shiʿi leaders and the ʿAbbasid court.

[138] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

[139] For the same argument made more comprehensively, see Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

[140] Asatryan, *Controversies*, 111–16.

representation of his claims to the broader community. The point where
the representation of charismatic-symbolic authority and fiscal-financial
policy meets most clearly at this period is in the rescripts (*tawqīʿ*), a key
mechanism of representation to the community employed by Abū Jaʿfar
as by his predecessors during the Occultation, representing the ongoing
tradition of fiscal-doctrinal bureaucracy rooted in several generations of
Imamic practice. The Imamis showed a great interest in the materiality of
these statements, including their handwriting and the process of obtain-
ing and preserving them.[141] The Occultation books dedicate separate
chapters to rescripts as distinct from other kinds of reports about the
hidden Imam, suggesting that in the developing discourse on the
Occultation they were understood to represent a distinct kind of evi-
dence. As with any text from the protean period of the early Occultation,
we must exercise skepticism regarding the historicity of these rescripts.
Our earliest Occultation-era evidence, Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, mentions a few
rescripts, but never mentions Abū Jaʿfar in connection to them (as
indeed, Abū Jaʿfar plays very little role in Kulaynī's account). Instead,
these rescripts as reported by Kulaynī are generally distributed anonym-
ously, with some mention of agents other than Abū Jaʿfar.[142] Are Abū
Jaʿfar's rescripts just a later attribution? There does appear to be a growth
of pseudepigraphal rescripts in later centuries.[143] The earliest explicitly
dated Occultation-era rescript is reported for 260/874, and associated
with Ḥājiz b. Yazīd.[144] Rescripts may well have been generated retro-
spectively, but what is certain is that the rescripts quoted in later sources
do genuinely derive from an early moment in the Occultation, for they
preserve material that makes no sense to have been fabricated later,
addressing early figures and contemporary debates, raising doubts
about the Occultation and the envoys, and including numerous obscur-
ities and subtleties. Again, Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh* provides a key early wit-
ness: showing us that at least by 290/903, the Imamic letters sent by the
agents of the hidden Imam were considered to be a crucial piece of
evidence for the existence of the hidden Imam, legitimating the authority
of the agents.

[141] See above, for the question of handwriting with reference to the succession between
ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Abū Jaʿfar. This continued to be a factor in the assessment of the
evidentiary status of reports in this period.

[142] Though Kulaynī's reports link the rescripts to Asadī, in two cases, and to a certain
Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās in one. *Kāfī*, 1:522–24.

[143] See, for example, Ṭabarsī's report of a *tawqīʿ* issued to Mufīd. Ghaemmaghami,
Encounters, 140–41.

[144] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 278. See the discussion of this in Chapter 4.

The rescripts associated with Abū Jaʿfar come in various forms, from telegraphic responses, to collections of lengthy responsa to various points of law, theology and political personnel, and, in one instance, a long prayer. In contrast to the rescripts of Ibn Rawḥ or Imamic letters before the Occultation which often come with instructions to be read out to several people or the people of a particular district,[145] Abū Jaʿfar's rescripts all appear to have been issued to single persons, albeit they were copied and distributed more widely thereafter. This individually focused correspondence is very evocative of the context within which Abū Jaʿfar was working. Sometimes, it seems that these communications are designed to meet the doubts of that single recipient,[146] or, in the case of the eclectic rescript, they are issued in response to multiple legal and theological questions, which may suggest the presence of a larger community behind the questioner. The delivery of the rescripts had a clear political role in their demonstration of support for the representative of the Imamate; and in affirming the official function of the agents who carried the questions and responses. As we have seen, Abū Jaʿfar's position within the networks of the Imamate is ambivalent: in some cases, he appears as the guiding force and the ultimate recipient of letters before they reach the Imam. In other reports he appears to be just a cog in the complicated mechanism of Imamic correspondence.

IMAMIC INSPIRATION AND IMAMIC ESTATES: RESCRIPTS TO ASADĪ

The rescripts must not be merely understood as letters, or as disembodied bureaucratic communications. Instead, they embodied the Imam's authority and presence to the community. In some reports, the Imamic presence implied by a rescript is made palpable. In one case, the agent Asadī is depicted as receiving a rescript issued by the hand of Abū Jaʿfar, after which he gains an intuition as to its interpretation and witnesses the miraculous alteration of the rescript:

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzāʿī transmitted from Abū ʿAlī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī from his father [Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī]:
    A rescript (tawqīʿ) from Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (QAR) reached me spontaneously, without a question having preceded it: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the curses of God and the angels

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[145] See, for example, the excommunication letters addressed in Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."
[146] As in the case of the letter given to Ibn Mattīl. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

and all people are upon whoever declares a single dirham of our money as licit (*istaḥalla*)."

Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī said: It occurred to me (*waqaʿa fī nafsī*) that this referred to someone who declared licit (*istaḥalla*) a dirham of the money of the *nāḥiya*, rather than someone who consumed it without declaring it licit (*dūna man akala minhu ghayr mustaḥallin lahu*). Then I said to myself: "But that is the case for anyone who declares the illicit to be licit, so what superiority over other people does the Imam (AS) have in that case?!"

He said: And I swear by Him who sent Muḥammad with the Truth as a bringer of good tidings, that I looked at the rescript after that, and I found that it had been transformed to what had occurred to me:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the curses of God and the angels and all the people are upon whoever consumes a single forbidden (*ḥarām*) dirham from our property."

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzāʿī said: Abū ʿAlī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī got this rescript out for us so that we saw it and read it.[147]

The interplay here between the bureaucratic authority of Abū Jaʿfar as envoy and the inspiration of Asadī is fascinating. The rescript echoes the language of the revenue-collection reforms in the eclectic rescript and has a precedent in earlier hadith from Imam Bāqir.[148] In sending it, then, Abū Jaʿfar was doing little innovative, other than applying it to the particular case at hand. It was Asadī whose inspiration (which is implied to be from the Imam, or perhaps directly from God) led to the change in interpretation, and the subsequent miraculous reediting of the rescript. The overall point of the rescript is that people should not misappropriate the money of the Imam. However, Asadī, in his internal monologue, takes exception to the wording of the rescript as issued to him. The curses are called down upon anyone who declares the money of the Imams (which Asadī interprets as referring to the money of the *nāḥiya*) to be licit. But, Asadī spots a problem, for declaring anything illicit to be licit is a sin, not just the property of the Imam. This leads him to suppose that the real case addressed must in fact not be declaration as licit, but illicitly consuming property belonging to the Imam. Sure enough, by a miracle, the text of the original rescript is miraculously corrected in conformity with what Asadī surmises.

[147] Ibid., 522.
[148] This earlier hadith, which forbids the misappropriation of the wealth of the family of the Prophet, and the Imams in particular, is helpfully quoted by Ibn Bābūya immediately before this rescript. Ibid., 521–22. My thanks to Kumail Rajani whose valuable comments greatly aided my interpretation of this text.

In spite of Asadī's miraculous corrections, it certainly seems plausible that the *nāḥiya* might have wanted to both explicitly forbid the declaration of the illicit as licit, as well as forbidding the misappropriation of Imamic properties. Since the time of Hādī there had been a problem of renegade agents appropriating Imamic funds locally, and not sending the money to Iraq. This rescript may have been directed both at those who were quietly enjoying the fruits of Imamic properties in the absence of an Imam, but also surely at the *bāb*s and others who claimed the authority to collect and distribute canonical Islamic revenues beyond *nāḥiya* control.

It is remarkable that Asadī, an agent who was supposedly subordinate to the envoy, at least in the classical conception, is seen here as intuiting a correction to a rescript, and receiving a miraculous confirmation of his edit. It suggests perhaps that some of the charismatic authority of the *nāḥiya* in fact resided beyond the sphere of the envoys. This report also creates tensions in the understanding of the operations of the *nāḥiya*, which could issue statements with inaccuracies or at least incomplete wordings. This implies that even in texts which recognize Abū Jaʿfar as agent, the charismatic authority of the *nāḥiya* is seen to be diffused among agents of the Imam, rather than fully vested in the central institutions.[149]

The context of Asadī's inspiration becomes clearer in a further rescript issued to him from Abū Jaʿfar which relates specifically to the status of Imamic endowments in the circumstances of Occultation:

Among what came to me from Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar (QAR) in response to my questions (*masāʾilī*) to the Lord of the Age (AS) was the following:

And as for what you asked about regarding the case of a *waqf* endowment to our *nāḥiya*, which is made over to us, but whose [original] owner has need of it afterward, well, in that case, everything that has not been transferred, then its owner has free choice over it, and everything that has been transferred, then its owner has no choice over it, whether he has need of it or not, whether he is in want of it, or can spare it.

And as for what you asked about regarding the case of someone who declares licit some of our property (*amwāl*) which is in his hands, and acts toward it as if it were his own property without our permission, well, whoever does that is accursed, and we will be his enemies on the Judgment Day. For the Prophet (SAAA) said: "Someone from my family (*ʿitratī*) who declares licit what God has forbidden (*ḥarrama*) is accursed by my tongue and the tongue of every prophet." For whoever commits an injustice against us is one of the unjust, and God's curse is upon him, according to His words (T), "Verily God's curse is upon the unjust."[150]

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149 This recalls again the pregnant phrase in which Asadī is listed as "one of the *bāb*s" in Ṭūsī's *Rijāl*, 439.
150 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 520–21.

The rescript goes on to discuss issues relating to estates (*ḍiyā '*) belonging to the *nāḥiya* in some detail. In the context of the historical moment, the fact that these questions were being posed suggests that the produce of Imamic estates in the Jibāl were being appropriated in the absence of an Imam, perhaps by executors who had formerly acted as part of the Imamic institutional hierarchy. The fact that Abū Jaʿfar was making an intervention in the matter of these estates and *waqf* endowments suggests that even after the Imams' inheritance had been settled, including the matter of the *waṣiyya* bequest claimed by Ḥudayth, there were still Imamic properties which were left in limbo. The rescript implies that members of the Prophet's family – perhaps *sayyid*s resident in the Jibāl or the agents of Jaʿfar "the Liar" – were claiming these revenues for themselves. Here, then, Abū Jaʿfar appears to be attempting to reestablish the financial basis of the Imamic institutions for the future. He does so by focusing on the presumably large, reliable income provided by Imamic-endowed estates rather than the collection of the alms taxes. It is not clear whether he was successful or not, though there are other accounts of the transportation of *waqf* money to Abū Jaʿfar, and then to Ibn Rawḥ after him, suggesting that this attempt at regulation may have been at least partially successful.[151]

THE ECLECTIC RESCRIPT AND ABŪ JAʿFAR'S FINANCIAL POLICY

The distinction made between people consuming the wealth of the Imams and the worse sin of declaring such misappropriations as licit is also present in a text discussed above in connection with the case of Ibn Mahziyār: the eclectic rescript issued by Abū Jaʿfar. In it, it is stated that anyone who appropriates the properties of the Imam will be eating hellfire. Again, this clearly suggests that the misappropriation of Imamic revenues was a pressing problem. It establishes as core concerns the linked issues of revenue, the justification of the Imamate of the hidden Imam, and the legitimate authority of Abu Jaʿfar against rivals like Jaʿfar "the Liar" and the Qarāmiṭa.[152]

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[151] Ibid., 501–2.

[152] The rescript seems to place financial difficulties implicitly in the context of inter-sectarian struggles. Thus, immediately after the rescript curses the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, presumably referring to the Qarāmiṭa, it turns again to fiscal matters, perhaps suggesting an implicit connection between the Qarāmiṭa and the appropriation of the Imam's money: "And those who have appropriated our monies [lit. 'the ones clothed in our monies' (*mutalabbisūn bi-amwālinā*)] will only be eating hellfire." Does this suggest

There are a number of points in the eclectic rescript where money is
mentioned: "As for your money, we accept it only to cleanse you.[153] Let
whoever wishes, send it, and let whoever wishes, stop. What God has given
me is better than what He has given to you."[154] This clearly echoes the
rescripts issued to Asadī, again suggesting that Abū Jaʿfar was developing
a coherent policy. The word used, *amwāl*, is a little ambivalent, meaning
money, wealth, or property, but in this context, it tends to refer to the alms
taxes, and particularly the *zakāt*. The purificatory function mentioned
makes this particularly likely. Further on, what appears to be another
dispensation is in fact more of an admonition:

And as for the regret of people who have doubted the religion of God (AJ)
regarding what they have delivered to us, well, we have discharged whoever sought
exemption: there is no need for gifts from the doubters.[155]

In this instance, then, it appears that a group of Imamis regretted having
delivered their dues to the *nāḥiya*, even requesting them back. The rescript
repudiates any contribution from these people, emphasizing the importance
of the acknowledgment of the Imam of the Age. This is not a dispensation,
then, for the gifts of the unbelievers are not needed by the Imam, the implica-
tion being that true believers will want to continue giving contributions.

In the following passage, a more specific statement is made about the
khums category of canonical tax, which was considered the particular
prerogative of the Imam:

As for the *khums*, it is declared licit (*ubīḥa*) for our Shiʿa: They have been granted
a dispensation for it until the time of the emergence of our affair (*juʿilū fī ḥillin minhu
ilā waqt ẓuhūr amrinā*) so that their births should remain clean and not be
abhorrent.[156]

Here, then, the Imam's followers are granted an ongoing dispensa-
tion from paying the *khums*,[157] until the appearance of the hidden

that converts to the Qarāmiṭa had misappropriated Imami money? It is possible, or it may
just be the juxtaposition of independent questions.

[153] Purification of the donor is a key function of both *khums* and *zakāt*. See Hayes, "Alms,"
287.

[154] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

[155] Ibid., 485. Compare with Arjomand's translation: "As for the repentance of those who
had shown doubt in the religion of God concerning their contribution to us, let those who
asked for the return of their goods have them back; we have no need of gifts from those
who doubt." "Imam *Absconditus*," 4.

[156] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

[157] This statement echoes earlier hadith of the Imams in which a dispensation was granted to
the believers. Hayes, "Alms," 289–90.

Imam.[158] Note that, though dealing with the same issue, this is not quite the language of *shar'ī* duties like the *khums* and *zakāt* being declared lapsed (*sāqit*), which occurred during the Būyid period.[159] Dispensation implies impermanence, to be later replaced by the resumption of payments.

Given the difficulties in enforcing payment of the canonical taxes that we see as soon as the agents of the early *nāḥiya* attempted to collect them,[160] the dispensations in these statements suggest that a laxer standard for the collection of alms taxes had become necessary. It must have become especially difficult to collect contributions with the institutional rupture following the deaths of the old guard agents of the Imam toward the end of the third/ninth century. Notably, however, while a dispensation is granted, a total rupture in the system is not envisaged. Instead it is declared, with regards to alms taxes, "let whoever wishes, send it, and let whoever wishes, stop."[161] While payment is not declared to be mandatory, the religious benefit of paying canonical taxes that underpin the sacred economy was left intact, even if the *khums* was now unenforceable and allowed to lapse for the time being. The financial-fiscal policy of the *nāḥiya* emphasized loyalty to the new doctrines and power structures over the practical need to collect all the historical Imamic dues.

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[158] It is notable that this rescript also tends to place the return of the hidden Imam a little further in the future than some would hope, for it addresses a polemic against members of the community who were claiming the immediate return of the hidden Imam, stating that the emergence of relief (*zuhūr al-faraj*) will be whenever God chooses, and that those who fix times for this event are liars: Abū ʿAlī b. Hammām transmits a rescript from Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān b. ʿAmrī which emphasizes this point, saying, "The time-appointers (*waqqātūn*) have lied!" Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483. This would seem to align with Arjomand's dating for this rescript to soon after 894/281 – or at least this element of this rescript – as it may point to those who believed that he would emerge when he was around thirty years old, or at least before his fortieth birthday, therefore sometime between 285/908 to 300/913 depending on which birth date was believed. Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 3.

[159] See Norman Calder, "*Khums* in Imāmī Shīʿī Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D.," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45, no. 1 (1982): 45. A comparison of the *ad hoc* early Occultation-era rulings of the envoys with later juristic contemplations on the nature of legal obligations in the absence of the Imam would merit further study.

[160] As we have seen, the early efforts of the old guard agents like Ḥājiz faced opposition, expressed in one report that the community "debated after the death of Abū Muḥammad about what was in the hands of the agents." Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:517; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277. Kulaynī has "Abū Muḥammad" where Khaṣībī has "Abū al-Ḥasan." It must be the former, for there was not such a crisis after the death of Hādī.

[161] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

In addition to the political and financial developments we have surveyed, Abū Jaʿfar appears in our sources as having been active in the development and dissemination of doctrine. In the following report, the transmitter claims to have seen an Imamic rescript issued by both the ʿAmrīs: it is not specified which, but we might therefore suggest that it was issued by Abū Jaʿfar backed up by his father's authority.[162]

Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿfar (RAA) said: I found it written down (*muthbat*) from him [al-ʿAmrī] (RA):

"(God has made you prosper in obedience to Him, and fixed you in His faith, and given you felicity by His approval), it has reached us what you both [ʿAmrīs] mentioned, regarding what al-Maythamī informed you about al-Mukhtār, and his debates (*munāẓarāt*) with the person he met and his argumentation with him that there was no successor (*khalaf*) except Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī ['the Liar'], and [al-Mukhtār's] correction of him (*taṣdīqihi iyyāhu*)."[163]

This depicts the ʿAmrīs as corresponding with the hidden Imam, or someone representing him, and providing a commentary on the grassroots debates between partisans of the hidden Imam and Jaʿfar "the Liar." The rescript continues with a severe rhetorical denunciation of the doubters replete with Qurʾānic vocabulary. Thus, the Imamic statements issued by Abū Jaʿfar responded directly to intellectual debates among frontline polemicists in their struggle against the followers of Jaʿfar "the Liar." This interlocks with what we have seen in Abū Jaʿfar's response to the issue of delegationism, which indicates his engagement with scholastic theological debates.

What was the content of the doctrines associated with Abū Jaʿfar? He certainly maintained elements that had already been established early in the Occultation, including elements that he attributed to his father. Several reports show Abū Jaʿfar as a transmitter of reports about the Occultation, in which he used his father's authority as an eyewitness to establish the birth of the son of Ḥasan and its celebration.[164] He continued the earlier policy of "don't ask, don't tell" regarding the specific details of the Imam,

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[162] Ibn Bābūya prefaces the report with the introductory statement, "A rescript from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) (AS) which was issued to al-ʿAmrī and his son (RAA) which was transmitted by Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh [al-Qummī]." The transmitter of the rescript is named as Abū ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿfar.

[163] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510–11. The rescript continues with a rhetorical denunciation of the doubters.

[164] For example, ibid., 430–31, 409.

and the prohibition of fixing a time for the return of the Imam, an issue which was to become particularly urgent during his tenure, as the hidden child Imam became an adult, and therefore could be expected to return. Abū Jaʿfar transmitted a report from his father in which Ḥasan articulated these key aspects of the continual existence of an Imam, the Occultation of his son, and the fact that time-fixers for the Imam's return were liars.[165]

Abū Jaʿfar's main emphasis was the existence of the hidden Imam based on the established Imami dogma that there must be a "proof" of God (the Imam) present on earth at all times.[166] Abū Jaʿfar provides little theological reasoning for this, instead preferring to assert that God had ordained an Occultation.[167] The nature of the Occultation is never clearly specified,[168] though it is generally surrounded by an air of mystery, and we are told that the Imam walks among his followers unseen during Ḥajj.[169] A further association with Ḥajj is made in one report in which ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī asks Abū Jaʿfar whether he has seen the Imam, and he replies in the affirmative, saying he saw him last at the Kaʿba in Mecca.[170] This suggests that, at least in some versions, Abū Jaʿfar did not claim to be in constant, regular contact with the Imam, but rather the Imam appeared to him at moments of heightened religious significance. With the establishment of the concept of envoy, the contact with the Imam increasingly appeared to be more regular. In the eclectic rescript, a reason for the Occultation is given: Imams in the past had been forced to state their allegiance (bayʿa) to a tyrant, but the hidden Imam will rise up without being restrained by his having given his word.[171] The rescript goes on to explain that Imamic guidance under conditions of Occultation is like the sun disappearing behind clouds: not visible, but still giving benefit to the world.[172] This vision of a cosmically infused guidance, rather than a directly present authority to whom one can pose questions on law and

[165] Ibid., 409. Given that al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī is seen here to predict the ghayba, we can suppose that it was originally circulated by Abū Jaʿfar in his father's name, rather than actually dating to the time of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Ḥasan.

[166] Ibid., 409, 483–85, 510–11.   [167] Ibid., 510–11.

[168] The Occultation therefore does not at this stage have to be understood as necessarily miraculous or supernatural, but could allow for an Imam merely in hiding. This can be contrasted with more supernatural understandings of the Occultation which took over later. See Ghaemmaghami, Encounters.

[169] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 226.   [170] Ibid.

[171] This reason enters the classical Twelver theological explanation for the Occultation, and is a development of the earlier justification, associated with the period of the phantom pregnancy, that the child Imam was hidden away due to fear.

[172] Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 485.

theology, is a key moment of pivoting in the role of the Imam under the Occultation. As Arjomand has noted, this conception prepared the way for a theology of Occultation that could be sustained for the long term.[173] However, this rescript was only one of several reports in which Abū Jaʿfar and the *nāḥiya* can be seen to actively engage in theological issues, giving an Imamic imprimatur to the fruits of intellectual engagement with the issues of the day.

RITUAL CATHARSIS

Perhaps as important as the content of the doctrines that Abū Jaʿfar disseminated is their form: he oversaw the performance of doctrine as practical religion. We have seen that, from the earliest period of the Occultation, the family and servants of the eleventh Imam seem to have encouraged the treatment of the Imams' house in Samarra as a shrine.[174] Following this early period, the references to making the pilgrimage to Samarra dwindle. Perhaps once Jaʿfar "the Liar" inherited the Imams' house, it became more difficult to organize the pilgrimage to the shrine of the two ʿAskarīs. It is likely that a similar disturbance was felt in many areas of Imami practice. Debates about which ritual obligations were still valid during the Occultation raged in subsequent centuries. While some members of the community may have been driven away, others felt the need to assert continuity. The appetite for ritual continuity in an uncertain time is clear in reports like the Qummī delegation hadith in which the community insists on continuing to pay Imamic revenues. The payment of *zakāt* and *khums* had not merely an economic function, but was a symbolic act within the world of rituals which tied the community to the Imam, and led to their purification and salvation. Other evidence suggests Abū Jaʿfar asserted continuity in ritual guidance offered by Imamic institutions. Thus, for example, he continued the pre-Occultation Imamic practice of issuing permissions for followers to make Ḥajj.[175] The rescripts show him issuing rulings on ritual matters. But the rescripts had a further function: the very fact of the continued experience of connection with the Imam's guidance was for many probably as important as the content of the Imam's

[173] As Arjomand writes, the rescript gave "the first central element of the future Shiʿi theology of occultation namely, that the benefits of the imamate as the continuous divine guidance of mankind continue despite the absence of the imam." "Crisis," 503. See also his analysis of the rescript in "Consolation."
[174] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.   [175] Ibid., 490–1.

prescriptions. Abū Jaʿfar is depicted in one report as issuing a prayer to be prayed in the current era of Occultation. It is, above all, a prayer for the patience and fortitude to meet the tribulations of the era. The prayer emphasizes the existence of the hidden Imam, balancing a hope for his return with a refusal to entertain speculation as to how and when he will appear.[176] Here, then, the possibility of an immediate return is maintained, but the believers are also enjoined not to despair at the length of his absence. Immediate chiliastic hopes are balanced with the need for more long-term patience.[177] The prayer responds to many of the doctrinal issues mentioned above, providing the simple believer with a cathartic occasion to vocalize the anxieties and uncertainties of the Occultation era.

CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF ABŪ JAʿFAR

In spite of the problematic nature of the sources, a picture emerges of Abū Jaʿfar's leadership. He asserted continuity in the old fiscal-financial network, which was imbued with the charisma of Imamate and provided those who acted within it with the prestige and resources of the sacred economy. A great deal of his energy went toward establishing his authority among the agents and community leaders who were the best means of connecting with different communities of the Shiʿa, near and far. With some of these agents he worked to persuade them of his mediation of Imamic guidance; he forged alliances with some like Asadī; he repudiated others who did not recognize him like Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī. Many of these processes continued after his death, including, as we shall see, the retrospective anathematization of agents who crossed Abū Jaʿfar during his lifetime. In order to make up for a neophyte's legitimacy deficit, Abū Jaʿfar affirmed his links to his father the agent, as well as arrogating to himself some of the aura of charismatic leadership of the *ghulāt bāb*s. Rather than seeing Abū Jaʿfar's authority as having been concocted retrospectively by the Nawbakhtīs as Klemm has done, we should see Abū Jaʿfar as having gradually asserted a growing role in not only in bureaucratic matters, but also in intellectual debates within which his administrative prestige allowed him to issue Imamic dicta. His authority was underpinned by a moderate form of delegationism supported by Abū

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[176] Ibid., 512–15.

[177] Arjomand, in particular, has a tendency to attempt to force actors and thinkers into the guise of chiliasts and non-chiliasts, but we should also note that a strong ambivalence and uncertainty characterizes many of the utterances of the *nāḥiya*.

Ṭāhir's hadith and others, implying that the position of envoy was envisaged as part of the cosmological hierarchy through which guidance issued from God to the prophets and the Imams, and through the Imams to be embodied in that time by the agents.

Meanwhile, Abū Jaʿfar continued to operate the complicated protocols of the secret network developed by the old guard agents. Abū Jaʿfar's major achievement was his reassertion of the continuity of the *nāḥiya* structure of intermediaries after the rupture created by the deaths of the old guard of the eleventh Imam. Continuity was asserted by broadcasting the existence of the hidden Imam through the dissemination of reports about him, and by issuing rescripts in his name. Abū Jaʿfar also attempted to maintain Imamic revenues. Somewhat surprisingly, he gave concessions and dispensations with regards to the alms taxes, but he asserted the overall legitimacy of the *nāḥiya*'s revenue-collection, and particularly stressed the collection of the revenue from *waqf* endowments and estates. This focus on endowments and estates may suggest a relationship between his claims and Ḥudayth's claim on the *waṣiyya* legacy and the Imams' *waqf* endowments.

Such is the picture that emerges from a close scrutiny of the reports. The process of back-projection of the envoy paradigm to the earliest phase of the Occultation has obscured the details of Abū Jaʿfar's life. Inconsistencies and contradictions still leave question marks over the dating of key sources like the eclectic rescript. Nonetheless, this picture of the general tenor of Abū Jaʿfar's activities is relatively consistent, albeit his authority was perhaps initially only accepted by a few people. His activities may only have been the seeds from which a later image of the envoy was grown. Nonetheless, once his authority was established after the deaths of the old guard agents, we can begin to speak of the concept of envoy as having been established in its basic parameters. And once he himself died, we see a process of institutionalization of the office of envoy.

6

Rise and Fall

*Ibn Rawḥ, Shalmaghānī, and the Rise and Fall
of the Envoyship*

When Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī died in 304/916 or 305/917, our sources indi-
cate that the community had a strong expectation that someone should
succeed to the office he had carved out. This expectation suggests that his
preeminent agentship was now understood not just as a residue of his own
personal charisma, but rather an office to be filled upon his demise. The
institutionalization of the office, which reports now first begin to explicitly
refer to as "envoy" (*safīr*), was partly based upon the desire for the
continuity of the pre-Occultation agentship that collected Imamic rev-
enues from the community; partly upon the personal example of Abū
Jaʿfar; and partly upon the need to have guidance embodied in some figure
who could provide answers to the ongoing doubts and perplexities of the
era. The man who would step into this role was Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn
b. Rawḥ b. Abī Baḥr al-Nawbakhtī. Though his succession came to be
accepted by the core of the Occultation faction, and leveraged by his
influential position in the administration of the ʿAbbasid government,
life was not to be easy for Ibn Rawḥ. We are told that he had a long period
of authority in the Imami community, from 304/916 or 305/917[1] until his
death in 326/938, but due to the complicated reversals of fortune at court,
several years of his envoyship were spent in hiding or in prison, and his
leadership of the Shiʿa was challenged by his former collaborator,
Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī (or Ibn al-Shalmaghānī), also known
as Ibn Abī al-ʿAzāqir. Like Ibn Rawḥ, Shalmaghānī was an ʿAbbasid
administrator, and the rivalry was conducted both in private, among the

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[1] See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 227–28, for Abū Jaʿfar's death date of 304. For Ibn Rawḥ's death in 326, see ibid., 241.

discreet networks of the Imami community, and in the public theater of cruelty of the collapsing ʿAbbasid government.

While Ibn Rawḥ's tenure was the culminating moment of the office of envoy, it was also the moment of its failure, for it barely survived his death.

THE SUCCESSION OF IBN RAWḤ TO ABŪ JAʿFAR

The Shiʿa expected someone to succeed to Abū Jaʿfar upon his death, but the choice of Ibn Rawḥ to succeed him was not a foregone conclusion, in spite of those reports which attempt to portray it as such. There were a couple of alternative candidates. Some people in the wider community seemed to have expected the succession to go to Ibn Rawḥ's kinsman Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, a more prominent and powerful member of the Shiʿi community.[2] Others appear to have expected the envoyship to pass to a man named Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. Mattīl. It is interesting to note that even during the lifetime of Abū Jaʿfar, this Ibn Mattīl is depicted as being disgruntled by his subordination to Abū Jaʿfar.[3] In one report, Ibn Mattīl remembers that he himself had been far closer to Abū Jaʿfar than Ibn Rawḥ:

Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. Mattīl al-Qummī said: Muḥammad b ʿUthmān Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī (RAA) had people who worked on his behalf (yataṣarraf lahu) in Baghdad; around ten people, and Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ (RAA) was among them, but all of them were closer to [Abū Jaʿfar] than Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ so that if he needed something, he would entrust it to the hand of someone else, because [Ibn Rawḥ] did not have such intimacy (khuṣūṣiyya). However, upon the death of Abū Jaʿfar (RAA), the choice fell upon him and the legacy (waṣiyya) went to him.[4]

Among the elite of the Shiʿa there was, then, a sense of surprise at the nomination of Ibn Rawḥ. Some, even, seem to have denied Ibn Rawḥ's fitness outright: in a report transmitted by Khaṣībī, a familiar argument returns to bite:

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī appointed Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī to succeed him, and passed his legacy (waṣiyya) on to him.

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[2] Ibid., 243.
[3] In one report, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl is disgusted that he is sent by Abū Jaʿfar to carry certain minor items as gifts to a loyal Imami in Wāsiṭ. Ibn Mattīl says, "Thereupon, a severe depression entered me and I said, 'Should one such as me be sent on this matter, and carry with me a paltry thing?'" Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 505. There is a divergence of names, but I assume that Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad and Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad are one and the same person.
[4] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 229.

But the Shiʿa criticized the acceptance of that succession, because while Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān was the trusted companion (*thiqa*) of the Imam, a person was not to be considered trustworthy (*thiqa*) except someone who was trustworthy before God and [the Imam].[5]

This report echoes Aḥmad b. Hilāl's critique of Abū Jaʿfar, suggesting that without direct Imamic designation, the envoyship of Ibn Rawḥ was not valid. It seems that some thought this designation was a purely human act rather than divinely sanctioned.

In spite of some surprise and some opposition to his accession, Ibn Rawḥ had certainly been embedded in Abū Jaʿfar's circle, a fact which is emphasized in reports intended to legitimate his unique fitness for the office of envoy.[6] Ibn Rawḥ was involved at a key moment in the contestation of Abū Jaʿfar's authority, for it was at the hand of Ibn Rawḥ that the statement cursing Aḥmad b. Hilāl was issued.[7] The testimony of Abū Jaʿfar's daughter, Umm Kulthūm, provides the interesting detail that Ibn Rawḥ was employed by Abū Jaʿfar as his agent, looking after his properties, for which he was paid a stipend (*rizq*) of thirty dinars per month, in addition to which he also benefited from gifts from "the viziers and the notables of the Shiʿa like the Furāt family and others."[8] Links with power, wealth, and influence associated with the court must have provided him with a political edge in the succession contest.

Criticism of Ibn Rawḥ was countered by circulating reports that he had been clearly designated by Abū Jaʿfar before he died.[9] Umm Kulthūm's succession report, for example, uses the explicit vocabulary of *naṣṣ* designation and *waṣiyya* to indicate the formal, quasi-Imamic mechanisms that led to the succession of Ibn Rawḥ.[10] Further evidence for the development of the formal vocabulary of envoyship comes in another family report transmitted by various Nawbakhtīs regarding Ibn Rawḥ's

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[5] Khaṣībī, *Hidaya*, 394–95. This report is continued, and proceeds to cast doubt on Ibn Rawḥ's successor. See the quotation of this continuation below, at the end of this chapter.

[6] Thus Dhahabī's Shiʿi informant, the *Tārīkh* of Yaḥyā b. Abī Ṭayy al-Ghassānī, notes that in the days of Abū Jaʿfar, Ibn Rawḥ had been the first to enter into his presence, among all the ranks (*ṭabaqāt*) of the Shiʿa, a claim that does not seem to harmonize with the surprise experienced by some at his accession to the envoyship, but which indicates the kind of propaganda which must soon have been mobilized to legitimate him. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1412/1992), 24:190.

[7] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248. It is likely that this was before Abū Jaʿfar's death after 305/917, though it is possible that Ibn Rawḥ issued it afterward, as part of the legitimation of the genealogy of his own envoyship.

[8] Ibid., 231.   [9] Ibid.   [10] Ibid., 225–26.

succession,[11] which is the earliest report to use the word *safīr* as a word for the envoyship:[12]

When Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī's condition became critical, a party (*jamāʿa*) of the elite (*wujūh*) of the Shiʿa ... came to Abū Jaʿfar (R[AA]) and they said to him: "If something happened, then who would take your place?"

He said to them: "This is Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ b. Abī Baḥr al-Nawbakhtī, who takes my place (*al-qāʾim maqāmī*), and he is the envoy (*safīr*) between you and the Lord of the Affair (*ṣāḥib al-amr*) (AS), and he is the agent (*al-wakīl*), and the reliable trustworthy one (*al-thiqa al-amīn*) so refer to him in your affairs and complain to him of your needs, for I have received the order about that and I have informed you of it."[13]

In addition to this designation by the previous envoy, rescripts from the hidden Imam were also issued to underscore Ibn Rawḥ's authority for the doubters. These are said to date both before the death of Abū Jaʿfar[14] and after,[15] though given the doubts expressed in the reports quoted above we can assume that they were only widely circulated after his accession to authority.

In spite of the clear involvement of the Nawbakhtī family in influencing the politics of the Occultation, we should now decisively put to rest Klemm's speculation that the envoyship was a pure concoction by a cabal of Nawbakhtīs and their associates, in favor of their kinsman, Ibn Rawḥ.[16] The richness of reports about Abū Jaʿfar's life, the concreteness of their details, the polemics surrounding his legacy, and the expectations of succession to his office all clearly indicate that Abū Jaʿfar's life and legacy was real enough to generate much material (from both supporters and dissenters) that later generations inherited, and had to make sense of. While we may debate the nature and periodization of Abū Jaʿfar's leadership, it is clearly rooted in historical events that could not have been just invented *ex nihilo* by Ibn Rawḥ and his associates.

Despite the differences in opinion over the succession, those who supported Abū Jaʿfar seem to have ultimately accepted the succession of Ibn Rawḥ, and when other Imamis saw this, it must have had the effect of ensuring unity among the core of the Occultation faction.[17] This unity is

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[11] The *isnād* is as follows: al-Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhim b. Nūḥ – Abū Naṣr Hibbat Allāh b. Muḥammad – his uncle Abū Ibrāhīm Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad al-Nawbakhti – his uncle Abū Jaʿfar ʿAbd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm and Abū Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm and a group of the Nawbakhtī family.

[12] See Introduction.   [13] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.   [14] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501–2.

[15] The language of this rescript contains the familiar reference to the agent as a "trustworthy one" (*thiqa*). Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231–32.

[16] Klemm, "*Sufarāʾ*," 146.   [17] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 229–30.

suggested in a key difference we see between the reports dealing with Ibn Rawḥ, and his predecessor, Abū Jaʿfar. The reports of Ibn Rawḥ prominently feature the support of a cohesive elite group of Shiʿa, referred to as the "great men" (*wujūh, kibār*), the "wise men" (*shuyūkh*), or the "party" (*jamāʿa*), recalling the elite group of men who served and represented the pre-Occultation Imams.[18] This palpable presence of an elite core of support for the envoys demonstrates that the community had moved on from the crisis days of the early Occultation, where the consolidation of elite consensus around leadership and doctrine was hindered by the plethora of competing politico-doctrinal models.[19]

By the time of his death, it seems that Abū Jaʿfar had won over the elite of the Shiʿa.[20] In addition to the courtier Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Bāqiṭānī,[21] several others are mentioned by name in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* as having been present upon Abū Jaʿfar's death, including the traditionist Abū ʿAlī b. Hammām, who was to be a crucial supporter of Ibn Rawḥ,[22] and the author of the *Tanbīh*, Abū Sahl Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī al-Nawbakhtī.[23] The Nawbakhtī involvement is significant for it indicates the link between the intellectual elaborations of the Occultation doctrine and the political authority of the envoyship.

The Nawbakhtīs were a prominent Baghdadi family of courtiers, who had been influential players at the ʿAbbasid court since the time of Manṣūr.[24] How and when their relationship with Imami Shiʿism was initiated is unclear, but by the time of the Occultation it was long established.[25] Abū Jaʿfar's relationship with the Nawbakhtīs is tantalizing. Klemm and Arjomand position the Nawbakhtīs as the overwhelming force for the consolidation of Twelver political authority and doctrine at this period, but they tend to take too much for granted and we should be more

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[18] See Wardrop's comments on the elite group surrounding the Imams and taking decisions about them, often referred to as the solidarity group (*al-ʿaṣaba*), or simply the companions (*aṣḥāb*). Wardrop, "Lives," esp. 12–17.

[19] Both doctrinal and political models, like the different explanations of who the Imam was, the mediation of Ḥudayth or Badr the eunuch, the hope placed in the pregnant concubine, and the Imamate of Jaʿfar "the Liar."

[20] Though the picture may be muddied by the possibility that the names associated with him may be back-projections from the elite of the following generation, keen to be associated with Abū Jaʿfar's prestige.

[21] See Chapter 5 and below.   [22] See Chapter 5.   [23] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

[24] Sean Anthony, "Nawbakhtī Family," *EIr.*   [25] Ibid.

circumspect in interpreting this undoubtedly significant relationship. While ʿAmrī-Nawbakhtī links by the time of Abū Jaʿfar's death are clear, the evidence does not allow us to date the genesis, or establish clearly the nature of an ʿAmrī-Nawbakhtī alliance. Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*, produced at the time of or after Abū Jaʿfar's rise to authority, is the first extant source to clearly articulate the legitimate authority of the agents in establishing the Occultation of the hidden Imam, and leading the community. The works of other Nawbakhtīs provided key ideological support for the new Twelver doctrines, especially the *Firaq* of al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, also produced at the turn of the fourth/tenth century, a heresiography which depicts the Occultation faction as the authentic culmination of the Shiʿi tradition within a world of deluded splittists.

There are just two major pieces of evidence for concrete ties between Abū Jaʿfar and the Nawbakhtīs. The first is the sickbed attendance already mentioned. Second, we see a dynastic alliance between the ʿAmrīs and Nawbakhtīs, for Abū Jaʿfar's daughter, Umm Kulthūm, married a Nawbakhtī, Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm.[26] Unfortunately, we do not know when this marriage took place, and therefore whether the ʿAmrī-Nawbakhtī alliance was the cause of, or the result of, facts like the rise of Abū Jaʿfar as envoy and Ibn Rawḥ's succession to this office.

A further tantalizing, albeit inconclusive detail about Nawbakhtī support for the Occultation faction is the fact that the pregnant concubine was said to have been housed by a Nawbakhtī after the pregnancy had been dismissed by the authorities.[27] This detail suggests that the Nawbakhtī in question[28] was allied with the pregnant concubine's protectors: perhaps Ḥudayth.[29]

Hussain and Iqbāl suggest that Ibn Rawḥ had particular connections to Qumm,[30] but they overstate the evidence.[31] If accepted, such connections

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[26] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231, makes clear that Ibn Barniya's maternal grandfather was Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nawbakhtī, while ibid., 259, indicates that Ibn Barniya's maternal grandfather was Abū Jaʿfar's daughter, Umm Kulthūm.

[27] Friedlander, *Heterodoxies*, 77. It would seem unlikely that anyone would have had anything to gain from making up a detail like this.

[28] Though historians might tend to assume that families act in concert, as a unified doctrinal and political bloc, anyone who has lived with one will know that this assumption is not always reliable.

[29] See previous chapters.

[30] Hussain, *Occultation*, 119; Iqbāl, *Khānedān*, 214. Arjomand is more circumspect about a Qummī connection. "Crisis," 507.

[31] It is true that Ibn Rawḥ was purportedly able to speak in the dialect of Āva near Qumm. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 504. Less convincingly, the editor of Dhahabī's *Tārīkh* struggling to make sense of an uncertain reading suggested that Ibn Rawḥ himself might have had the *nisba* "al-Qummī." Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:190.

might suggest he had a role in the cementing of the Qummī-Baghdadi axis which appears as the crucial foundation of support for the envoys.

The prominence of the Nawbakhtī family in Baghdad society, and in the ʿAbbasid administration, lent them power and influence also within the Shiʿi community. A rare glimpse of the role of wealth and political power in shaping the institutions of the Imamate can be seen in a report from Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī. In it, Abū Ghālib confesses of his intentions to make a bequest of an agricultural estate to the *nāḥiya*, for all the wrong reasons:

Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī said: A long while ago . . . I wrote a note in which I asked [Ibn Rawḥ] to accept my [donation of] an agricultural estate, though my intention in doing that was not thereby to draw closer to God (AJ), but rather out of a desire to mix in the company of the Nawbakhtīs, entering into what they were involved in in this world.[32]

The Nawbakhtīs, then, were associated in the Shiʿi community with a path to worldly success, presumably based upon their involvement in the ʿAbbasid administration and the wealth that accrued from their position of influence,[33] to such an extent that it was worth making gifts of land in the hope of gaining favors from them.

SUCCESSION AND THE COURT

In one report, we are told that,

[Ibn Rawḥ] had a great place with regard to the *sayyid* [the Imam][34] and [the caliph] al-Muqtadir, and the generality of people also praised him, and Abū al-Qāsim [Ibn Rawḥ] attended [court] in *taqiyya* and fear.[35]

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[32] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 193.The narratives suggests that due to his bad faith, the donation was not accepted at that time, reproducing the trope to be found in Imamic hadith in which donations to the Imamate are not sought out as beneficial to the Imam, but rather beneficial to the donor, who is thereby purified.

[33] The Nawbakhtīs referred to in this report probably include, as well as Ibn Rawḥ, luminaries like Abū Sahl and ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Nawbakhtī, who later became the *kātib* of the Amīr al-Umarāʾ, Ibn Rāʾiq, and a key player in arranging his affairs. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī bi-Allāh wa-l-Muttaqī li-Allāh aw Tārīkh al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya min sanat 322 ilā sanat 333 Hijriyya: min Kitāb al-awrāq*, ed. J. Heyworth Dunne (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣāwī, 1354/1935), 87. Indeed, the passage quoted might be read "the two Nawbakhtīs" (*al-nawbakhtiyayn*), which would strengthen this association.

[34] While the identity of this *sayyid* is unclear, it most probably refers to the hidden Imam, though is not the typical address of the Imam. Another possibility is that it read "the *sayyid* al-Muqtadir," but an "and" was inserted at some point in order to remove the honorific from the name of the caliph.

[35] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 239–40.

This report seems intended to harmonize Ibn Rawḥ's greater involvement in court society with the attitude of suspicion theoretically reserved by the Shiʿa for those who interacted with the caliphal authorities.[36] Ibn Rawḥ's public life marked a break from the secretiveness employed by Abū Jaʿfar and the earlier *nāḥiya* – whom Abū Sahl had referred to as "hidden trusted ones." Dhahabī carries a story of Ibn Rawḥ's succession, which he copied from the sixth–seventh/twelfth–thirteenth-century Shiʿi historian Yaḥyā b. Abī Ṭayy al-Ghassānī.[37] Though this is a relatively late source, and may represent further retrospective elaboration, it provides interesting details regarding the intersection of court life and the Shiʿi community:

When Abū Jaʿfar died, the deputyship (*niyāba*)[38] went to Abū al-Qāsim [Ibn Rawḥ]. He sat in a house in Baghdad, with the Shiʿa sitting around him. And Dhukāʾ the eunuch (*al-khādim*) brought out his staff (*ʿukkāz*) and scroll[39] and a casket (*ḥuqqa*). [Dhukāʾ] said: "Our *mawlā* [Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī][40] said, 'If Abū al-Qāsim buries me and then sits [in assembly], then hand this over to him, for in the casket (*ḥuqq[a]*) are the seals (*khawātim*) of the Imams.'" Then at the end of the day, [Ibn Rawḥ] stood up with a faction of people (*ṭāʾifa*) and he entered the house of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad [the previous envoy] …[41] and his followers

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36 See Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise on the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government (*Masʾala fī 'l-ʿamal maʿa 'l-sulṭān*)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 18–31.

37 For the dates of this figure, see Kāmil Salmān al-Jabbūrī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ min al-ʿaṣr al-jāhilī ḥatā sanat 2002 m* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1428/2007), 7:12–13.

38 This term is used sparingly in the early sources, and probably reflects the retrospective canonization of the envoys as deputies of the Imam.

39 Following Ṣafadī's version, reading *madraj* (scroll), instead of Dhahabī's *madḥ* (eulogy). Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnawūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 2000), 12:226. The scroll recalls mythic bequests which had been associated with the Imamate going back to ʿAlī, which was understood to include books of hidden wisdom. For a description of the early Shiʿi conception of *waṣiyya*, including the transmission of physical items like swords, turbans and, of course, books, see Rubin, "Prophets."

40 Massignon understands the *mawlā* mentioned here as referring to the caliph (*Passion*, 1:315), but this makes no sense. Instead, the *mawlā* in question must be Abū Jaʿfar himself, the man whose death, burial, and succession is the occasion around which the anecdote revolves. This perpetuates the appropriation of Imamic vocabulary and symbols to underscore the authority of envoys: as we have seen in Chapter 3, the burial and conducting of funerary rites for one's predecessor was taken as a potent symbol of succession to the Imamate.

41 Again, I follow here the version of Ṣafadī (*Wāfī*, 12:226): While Dhahabī has "Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī," it makes more sense to omit, as Ṣafadī does, the mention of Shalmaghānī and instead to understand this to be the house of the deceased Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī, the previous envoy. In this reading, after sitting in state, the new envoy would go with his retinue to the house of his predecessor, Abū Jaʿfar. This would suggest that the seat of the Imamate had become the house of the

(*ghāshiya*) became numerous; so that the commanders (*umarāʾ*) would ride to him, and the viziers and those expelled from the vizierate, and the notables.[42]

This report should be read cautiously, for the depiction of Dhukāʾ the eunuch's act appears to reproduce the mythic tropes of Imamic succession and bequest, which typically included the transmission of documents of hidden knowledge, weapons, and artifacts passed down from the earlier Imams. The mention of seals gestures at power as well as the mundane protocols of fiscal administration, as seals were required to seal edicts from the Imam before dissemination. (For an example of a contemporary seal, see Figure 9.[43]) Why Dhukāʾ the eunuch, an ʿAbbasid military slave and governor, is involved in this process is left a mystery.[44] But it is in some way corroborated by the chronicles of this period, which show that the Shiʿi

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envoy, and Ibn Rawḥ's move there upon Abū Jaʿfar's death seems to have been a symbolic act indicating his succession, as well as, perhaps, a practical act for taking charge of the institutions Abū Jaʿfar had located there.

[42] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:190.

[43] This seal is attributed to the tenth–eleventh centuries, and bears the pious phrase "God is sufficient for us, and the best of executors" (*ḥasbunā Allāh wa-niʿam al-wakīl*). It is engraved from agalmatolite, measuring 1.9 x 2 cm. The image has been generously provided by the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art of which it is part, inventory number TLS 823.

[44] Massignon notes that Dhukāʾ al-Khādim was a military governor of Egypt in the name of Muʾnis the Victor while his son was a *mawlā* of the vizierial family the Banū al-Fūrāt. Massignon, *Passion*, 1:315n83. The image of the slave or servant executor recalls earlier tropes, including the role of Badr the eunuch as a mediator for the Imamic legacy, and, more directly, the role of the slave Nafīs who was said to have passed on the *waṣiyya*

elite were intertwined with ʿAbbasid administrators and courtiers. In spite of the theologized narratives of stark ideological opposition between the supporters of the ʿAbbasids and the Shiʿa, practically, there was no such stark division between them, and life at court involved the negotiation of various different kinds of religious, ethnic, lineal, and pragmatic bonds.[45]

IBN RAWḤ AND SHALMAGHĀNĪ: CASHFLOW, TORTURE, AND HERESY AT THE CALIPHAL COURT

The stories of Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī[46] vividly illustrate the extent to which claims to religious authority and political and financial politics were intertwined in ʿAbbasid Baghdad. This was a time when many of those connected to the high office of the vizierate had their lives turned upside down every time a new vizier was installed. Both Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī were caught up in this turbulence. Both were connected to the influential Shiʿi[47] vizierial family, but also forged other alliances as a way of hedging against the inevitable rise and fall of fortune of their patrons.

 In order to understand the political webs in which these rivals were enmeshed, we must go back to the accession of the caliph Muqtadir. Muqtadir was aged only thirteen in 295/908 when he was picked out for

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bequest from al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī to Jaʿfar "the Liar." See Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been."

[45]   For the negotiation of communal dynamics, see Marina Rustow, "Patronage in the Context of Solidarity and Reciprocity: Two Paradigms of Social Cohesion in the Premodern Mediterranean," in *Patronage, Production, and Transmission of Texts in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Cultures*, ed. Esperanza Alfonso and Jonathan Decter (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014), 13–44.

[46]   Hitherto, the most comprehensive treatment of the political context for their rivalry is a few pages in Iqbāl's *Khānedān* and Massignon's *Passion*. I am indebted to both, but what follows is based on my rereading of the primary sources. Massignon, in particular, is an unreliable guide, with his mixture of erudite citation, often unclearly attributed, and idiosyncratic speculation. More recently, Abdulsater has made a useful contribution. "Dynamics."

[47]   One member of the Banū al-Furāt is mentioned as having been the acolyte of Ibn Nuṣayr, and a potential successor to him: "When Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr became sick, with the sickness from which he died, it was said to him when his speech was impeded, 'Who does this affair (*amr*) go to after you?' And he said, with a weak, tied tongue, 'Aḥmad,' but it was not known who that was. And they split into three factions after that. One faction said, 'He is Aḥmad, his son,' and one faction said, 'He is Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Furāt.'" Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 247–48; Louis Massignon, "Les origines Shīʿites de la famille vizirale des Banū 'l-Furāt," in *Mélanges offerts à Gaudefroy-Démombines par ses amis et anciens élèves*, ed. William Marçais (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1935–40), 25–29.

the caliphate from among several ʿAbbasid princes through the support of
ʿAlī b. al-Furāt.[48] Many were unhappy with the accession of a minor,
leading to a coup attempt in favor of Ibn al-Muʿtazz four months later.[49]
The coup failed and, as a result, the conspirators were distanced from
power.[50] Instead, those who had stayed loyal to Muqtadir were favored by
the young caliph and his influential mother. The major supporters of the
caliph were Ibn al-Furāt, who became Muqtadir's vizier after the coup, and
Muʾnis the Victor (al-Muẓaffar),[51] a eunuch slave general who brought
with him the crucial element of military support for the government. Ibn
al-Furāt's rival for the vizierate during this period was ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā-Jarrāḥ.
ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā had, it is true, participated in the coup, but his reputation with
Muqtadir was rehabilitated through the intercession of Muʾnis the Victor
in 301/913.[52] Thereafter, Muʾnis and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā tended to be allied against
Ibn al-Furāt and his faction for control of caliphal policy. These were the
crucial players at the court of Muqtadir, with power oscillating between
them for much of his reign. As the factions vied, increasingly vicious
reprisals were targeted against outgoing viziers and their administrations
when a new vizier was installed. Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī's story is
intimately connected to these cycles of violence.

   It might be assumed that, because Ibn al-Furāt was Shiʿi and the protégé
of a Shiʿi vizier,[53] and because ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, his great rival for the vizierate,
was not Shiʿi, that this rivalry can be expressed in binary sectarian terms.
This assumption, however, is not supported by the sources, which provide
much more granular detail for people's motivations, which cannot be
distilled into a binary Shiʿi-Sunni divide. Certainly, as the case of Ibn

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[48] Miskawayh depicts this as an act of Ibn Furāt's manipulation of the caliphate for his own
ends: a minor would be more pliable and less likely to put a stop to his accumulation of
wealth. But this version serves the aims of Miskawayh's narrative and is not fully corrob-
orated by other narratives. Hugh Kennedy, "The Reign of al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32):
A History," in *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court: Formal and Informal Politics in
the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32)*, ed. Maaike van Berkel, Nadia Maria El
Cheikh, Hugh Kennedy, and Letizia Osti (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 18–21.

[49] Ibid., 22–23.

[50] In particular, the former vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan and Muḥammad b. Dāwud b. al-
Jarrāḥ. Ibid., 22.

[51] This title was applied to him a few years later for his role in driving back the Fatimid Mahdī
in 307/919–20. See Harold Bowen, "Muʾnis al-Muẓaffar," *EI2*.

[52] Harold Bowen, *The Life and Times of ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsá, "the Good Vizier"* (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1928), 113–16.

[53] Ibn Bulbul. See Maaike van Berkel, "The Vizier," in *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid
Court: Formal and Informal Politics in the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32)*,
ed. Maaike van Berkel, Nadia Maria El Cheikh, Hugh Kennedy, and Letizia Osti (Leiden:
Brill, 2013), 71.

Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī illustrates, religious communities generated their own internal political rifts which could interrupt the potential for sectarian solidarity. Family and patronage were far more important indicators of affiliation, and though these could follow religious affiliation, they did not do so necessarily. Actors with different kinds of Shiʿi affiliation would not necessarily have considered each other to be natural allies.[54]

The idea that Shiʿi bureaucrats and statesmen were less likely to be loyal to the ʿAbbasid regime, an idea willingly embraced by Massignon,[55] appears in the sources largely as a topos of political propaganda. Such propaganda seems to have been especially useful in mobilizing the populace in an age when the Qarāmiṭa regularly posed direct threats to lives and livelihoods. It is best to avoid simplistic dichotomies and to study the evidence on its own terms, which leads us to reconstruct more complex networks of support, patronage, and rivalry, within which sectarian affiliation may have a part, but often does not play the decisive role.

THE POLITICAL CAREERS OF IBN RAWḤ AND SHALMAGHĀNĪ

The chronology of Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī is somewhat confused. However, we can reconstruct the following timeline:[56]

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[54] It is true that Ibn al-Athīr draws a connection between Shalmaghānī's doctrines and the pro-Furātī doctrines of the similarly esotericist Nuṣayriyya: "And how similar [Shalmaghānī's] doctrines are to the doctrines of the Nuṣayriyya, and perhaps they are identical [i.e. the same group], for the Nuṣayriyya believe in Ibn al-Furāt and make him the head of their *madhhab*." Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden: Brill, 1862), 8:294. Other sources note a connection between the Nuṣayriyya and the Banū al-Furāt: Ṭūsī also notes that Ibn Nuṣayr had been supported by a certain Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt, and that Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Furāt claimed to succeed to the religious authority of Ibn Nuṣayr after his death. *Ghayba*, 247–48. Doctrinal similarity between Shalmaghānī and the Nuṣayriyya does not, however, necessarily imply an alliance. Indeed, if both Shalmaghānī and one of the Banū al-Furāt claimed religious authority, this was as likely to have placed them into conflict against each other, rather than suggesting an alliance. Examples such as the rivalry between Isḥāq al-Aḥmar and Ibn Nuṣayr and their followers indicate that doctrinal similarity sometimes lays the groundwork for contentions, rather than implying political cooperation.

[55] For example, Massignon, *Passion*, 1:303–7.

[56] For the political events in this timeline, see Hugh Kennedy, "Timeline," in *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court: Formal and Informal Politics in the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32)*, ed. Maaike van Berkel, Nadia Maria El Cheikh, Hugh Kennedy, and Letizia Osti (Leiden: Brill, 2013) x–xii; and Kennedy, "Muqtadir." For other events relating more specifically to Shalmaghānī and Ibn Rawḥ, I provide details in the footnotes.

304/916 or 305/917:[57] Abū Jaʿfar dies and Ibn Rawḥ succeeds him.

304/916–306/918: Ibn Rawḥ moves smoothly through the world of court politics, during the second vizierate of his patron, Ibn al-Furāt.[58]

306/918: Ibn al-Furāt is removed from the vizierate.

306/918–311/923: The vizierate of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, under the tutelage of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā.

306/918: Ibn Rawḥ had trouble with the new vizier, Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās: it was perhaps at this moment that he was faced with the seizure of his wealth and he may have gone into hiding to avoid payment and punishment.[59] While in hiding, Ibn Rawḥ appointed Shalmaghānī as his agent.[60] This being the case, Ibn Rawḥ probably did not expose Shalmaghānī's heresy during the vizierate of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, in contrast to Ibn al-Athīr's statement.[61]

309/922: Execution of Ḥallāj, to whom Shalmaghānī will be compared.

311–12/923–24: Ibn al-Furāt's third and final vizierate.

312/924: Ibn Rawḥ is imprisoned by the incoming caliphal administration upon the removal and execution of Ibn al-Furāt.

312/924:[62] Soon after his imprisonment, Shalmaghānī's doctrines become known to Ibn Rawḥ, who issues a statement from his place of imprisonment cursing Shalmaghānī in the month of Dhū al-Ḥijja/March.

313/935 or 317/929: According to one report, Ibn Rawḥ was released "a short time after" the issuing of the excommunication in 312/924,[63] which would be early

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[57] See note 1 above.

[58] Ibn al-Furāt was appointed vizier for the second time on 9 Dhū al-Ḥijja 304/3 June 917. Kennedy, "Timeline," x.

[59] "And Abū al-Qāsim continued like this state for a time, abundantly graced with respect (*ḥurma*) until Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās was appointed to the vizierate and then there occurred too many affairs (*khuṭūb*) to explain." Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:191. These affairs of Ibn Rawḥ are not explicated here, but we can assume that it was due to being taxed for more money, due to the witness of ʿArīb, who notes that Ibn Rawḥ came to be imprisoned in the caliphal palace because money had been demanded from him. ʿArīb b. Saʿd al-Qurṭubī, *Ṣilat tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, published as one of several appendices (*Dhuyūl tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*) to the edition of Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1397/1977), 121–23.

[60] The only source I have come across that mentions Ibn Rawḥ's hiding is Ṭūsī's citation of the report of Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī: "I came to Kufa when I was a young man (*shābb*) . . . and that was in the days of Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ (RA) and his hiding (*istitārihi*) and his appointment of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, known as al-Shalmaghānī, who was then righteous (*mustaqīm*), and the *kufr* and *ilḥād* which was to emerge from him had not yet emerged." *Ghayba*, 190–91.

[61] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:217. The idea that Ibn Rawḥ attacked Shalmaghānī for heresy at this moment seems incompatible with the idea that he appointed him as his agent in the same period. The dating of 312/924 for Ibn Rawḥ's anathema is repeated in multiple sources and therefore it seems a stable point.

[62] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 193–94.   [63] Ibid.

313. Another pair of reports seem to contradict this, indicating the date of his release as occurring in 317/929 at the time of Muqtadir's temporary deposition.[64]

312/924–322/934: Shalmaghānī goes into hiding to escape the reprisals being carried out against the followers of Ibn al-Furāt and the accusations of heresy leveled against him. He stays first in Baghdad,[65] then takes refuge in Mosul, where he stays until 317/929 at the latest.[66] Then he returns to Baghdad again.[67]

322/934: Shalmaghānī emerges from hiding in Shawwāl 322/September–October 934.[68] He calls for a *mubāhala* contest against Ibn Rawḥ, causing a scandal at the house of Ibn Muqla. This leads to Shalmaghānī's imprisonment, inquisition, then execution on the first day of the following month of Dhū al-Qaʿda.[69]

326/938: Ibn Rawḥ dies in the month of Shaʿbān/June.[70]

Ibn Rawḥ's career in the ʿAbbasid administration was advanced by the fact that he was connected to the Furāt family,[71] among other notables connected to the government. We are told that Shalmaghānī was attached more specifically to Ibn al-Furāt's son, Muḥassin b. al-Furāt. These ties are described as having been both professional, as Muḥassin deputized his

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[64] There is also a slight disagreement in these sources regarding exactly when Ibn Rawḥ was freed. Dhahabī has Ibn Rawḥ being freed by Muqtadir upon his restoration: "When Muqtadir was returned to the caliphate, they took counsel from [the caliph] about him [Ibn Rawḥ]. [The caliph] said: 'Leave him! For it was through [my] sin against him that what happened to us, happened.'" *Tārīkh*, 24:191. ʿArīb maintains that he was freed a few days earlier, by Muʾnis, alongside ʿAli b. ʿĪsā when Muqtadir's was about to be deposed, and his palace was being raided by Nāzūk and the others. *Ṣila*, 122–23. Ibn al-Athīr also mentions the freeing of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā as having taken place upon Muqtadir's deposition, though there is perhaps no reason to assume that the two were released at the same time. *Kāmil*, 8:149. Iqbāl argues for the release date after five years of imprisonment. *Khānedān*, 218. It is, of course, possible that Ibn Rawḥ was imprisoned more than once in this turbulent period.

[65] "Then Shalmaghānī was pursued during the vizierate of Khāqānī [312–13/924–25] and he hid and fled to Mosul." Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:217.

[66] "He stayed several years with Nāṣir al-Dawla al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān during the lifetime of his father, ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān [r. 906–29, Ḥamdānids]." Ibid.

[67] "He and his followers were sought during the vizierate of Ibn Muqla for Muqtadir [i.e. before 322!], but they were not found." Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Ismāʿīl al-Ṣāwī (Cairo: Maktabat al-sharq al-islāmiyya, 1357/1938), 343; Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *al-Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb* [=*Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*], E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, 6 vols., ed. D. S. Margoliouth (Leiden: Brill, 1907–27), 1:297.

[70] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 241.

[71] Ṭūsī notes that Ibn Rawḥ received gifts from the Furāt family and other notables during the lifetime of Abū Jaʿfar. Ibid., 231.

protégé to tasks within the governmental administration,[72] but also involving support for his doctrinal program,[73] though such accusations should be accepted with caution.[74] Shalmaghānī must have been an effective political operator, for he was also sponsored by the Sunni vizier Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, who was appointed as an alternative to Ibn al-Furāt, and his vizierate was placed under the tutelage of Ibn al-Furāt's great rival, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā.[75] This association with two opposing vizierial camps allowed Shalmaghānī to act as an intercessor for his Furātid patron. When Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās intended to seize large sums from the members of the previous Furātid administration, Shalmaghānī stepped forward to intercede on Muḥassin's behalf in order to spare him the torture which sometimes accompanied such attempts.[76] However, although Shalmaghānī's intercession was ultimately successful, his attempts initially enraged the vizier, who took out his rage with a humiliating assault on Muḥassin: as Tanūkhī puts it, "giving him the famous slap which led to al-Muḥassin killing [Ḥāmid] when [al-Muḥassin's] father was appointed to his third spell as vizier [311–12/923–24]."[77] This, then, would seem to associate Shalmaghānī with both pro- and anti-Furātid camps, for a time playing the fragile role of mediator.

When Ibn al-Furāt regained power in 311/923, he and his son, having been themselves tortured upon losing power,[78] exacted the by-now usual property seizures upon their predecessors, but this time with unusual ferocity. Shalmaghānī himself was involved in the widespread retribution when the Banū al-Furāt were returned to power, according to ʿArīb:

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[72] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:296.   [73] Ibid.

[74] Accusations of doctrinal heterodoxy were repeatedly used to bring down political opponents in this highly charged era of court rivalries. A failure to militarily defeat the Qarāmiṭa during his vizierate led to ʿAlī b. al-Furāt coming to be known by the Baghdad crowd as "the Greater Qarmaṭī," while his son Muḥassin was known as "the Lesser Qarmaṭī." Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam*, ed. Abū al-Qāsim Imāmī (Tehran: Surūsh, 1419/1998), 5:189, partially translated as *The Eclipse of the ʿAbbasid Caliphate: Original Chronicles of the Fourth Islamic Century*, trans. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Blackwell, 1921).

[75] According to Tanūkhī, following the second vizierate of ʿAlī b. al-Furāt, Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās brought Shalmaghānī with him from Wāsiṭ to Baghdad to serve in the administration when he was appointed to the vizierate. Al-Muḥassin b. ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa-akhbār al-mudhākara*, ed. ʿAbūd al-Shāljī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1416/1995), 3:174. Shalmaghānī was a native of Wāsiṭ, where Ḥāmid had been a tax-farmer. Kennedy, "Muqtadir," 29.

[76] Kennedy, "Muqtadir," 24, quoting Bowen, *Life and Times*, 27–28.

[77] Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, 3:175.

[78] First during the accession to the vizierate of Ibn Khāqān. Bowen, *Life and Times*, 112–13.

[Al-Muḥassin] had deputized [Shalmaghānī] to the court to work for a number of administrators (ʿummāl). And [Shalmaghānī] had a friend from Basra, known for sticking loyally to him, audacious in [shedding blood]. And al-Muḥassin handed over to this Basran friend of [Shalmaghānī][79] a group among whom were Nuʿmān b. ʿAbd Allāh and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. Mā Shāʾ Allāh and Muʾnis[80] the eunuch of Ḥāmid. He made it public that he was pursuing them for the money that remained to be claimed from them. And when he got hold of them, he slaughtered them like sheep. And a group were in hiding, and Ibn al-Furāt [the father] wrote fine letters to them so that they came out of hiding, then seized their property (ṣādarahum) and extracted much wealth from them.[81]

This ongoing pattern of tit-for-tat violence suggests that Shalmaghānī's own execution, later, may have been motivated by more than just doctrinal heresy. His Furātī protectors, ʿAlī and Muḥassin, were executed on 9 Rabīʿ II 213/July 18, 924,[82] as a direct reprisal for the violence of their own reprisals.

The fiscal crisis in the caliphate had been exacerbated by the depredations of the Qarāmiṭa, based in Hajar in eastern Arabia, who from 311/923 began again to attack Iraq with renewed vigor.[83] Thus it is no coincidence that when the caliphate suffered defeat after defeat against the Qarāmiṭa, the political rhetoric that surrounded the fall of the ruling Banū al-Furāt was filled with accusations of secret collaboration with the Qarāmiṭa. No doubt the esoteric Shiʿi orientation of the Furātids facilitated such scapegoating.

Ibn Rawḥ had been supported by the Banū al-Furāt,[84] so it is not surprising that he was imprisoned at the time of the fall of the house of Furāt, in 312/924. He, too, had been accused with the same slurs as the Banū al-Furāt: that he was a fifth columnist for the Qarāmiṭa, and had siphoned off tax revenues to enrich himself.[85] Given Ibn Rawḥ's own

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[79] In fact, it reads "this Basran friend of Ibn al-Furāt," but this does not make sense.

[80] The text reads "Mūnis." This is not to be confused with Muʾnis the Victor, the general and kingmaker of this period, who was a ghulām of Muʿtaḍid. Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2005), 151.

[81] Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 5:186.   [82] Kennedy, "Muqtadir," 35.

[83] This was occasioned by the emergence of a new policy under a new leader, Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī. Ibid., 34.

[84] As we have seen, Umm Kulthūm mentions his receiving financial support from "the viziers and the notables of the Shiʿa like the Furāt family and others." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

[85] "And among the things [Ibn Rawḥ] was accused of was that he corresponded with the Qarāmiṭa that they should come and besiege Baghdad and that the money was taxed for him." Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:191. As ʿArīb says, "[Ibn Rawḥ] had been imprisoned also due to money which was demanded of him." *Ṣila*, 122.

claims to Shiʿi religious authority within the Imami community, accusa-
tions that he was attached to the Qarāmiṭa were likely to have been mere
political slurs, for he had more to fear than to gain from associating with
them.[86] Meanwhile, at this moment, Shalmaghānī was neither imprisoned
like Ibn Rawḥ, nor executed along with ʿAlī and al-Muḥassin b. al-Furāt.
When they were deposed, he went into hiding and traveled to Mosul,
where he was sheltered by the independent power of the Ḥamdānid prince,
Nāṣir al-Dawla al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān, "during the lifetime of
his father [ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān [d. 317/929]."[87] (Another thinker on
Shalmaghānī's doctrinal spectrum, Khaṣībī, also sought protection under
the Ḥamdānids.)[88] Several of Shalmaghānī's high-profile followers from
the administrative class followed him into hiding.[89] He returned in secret
to Baghdad, by 317/929 at the latest.[90]

   It was upon first being imprisoned in 312/924 that Ibn Rawḥ's squabble
with Shalmaghānī began in earnest. In the same year, Ibn Rawḥ issued
a statement of cursing and excommunication against him. Ibn Rawḥ was
either released "a short time after,"[91] or held in the palace for a further five
years, and only released when he was found in the palace during the coup
which forced Muqtadir to abdicate in favor of his brother, the caliph Qāhir
in 317/929.[92] When Muqtadir was restored, we are told that the caliph
was asked about the case of Ibn Rawḥ, and he responded, "Leave him! For
it was through [my] sin against him that what happened to us,

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[86] Both in his role as the envoy to the hidden Imam as well as an ʿAbbasid administrator, he
had far more to lose by encouraging the Qarāmiṭa than to gain. However, as a Shiʿi he was
more vulnerable to such a smear, which was applied also to ʿAlī and Muḥassin b. al-Furāt.

[87] Ibn al-Athīr, Kāmil, 8:217.   [88] Friedman, Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, 31–33.

[89] "It was said that the vizier al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Wahb, the vizier of al-
Muqtadir, the two sons of Bisṭām, and [the secretary] Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. Abī ʿAwn and
others followed [Shalmaghānī] and they were pursued, and went into hiding, and that was
in the days of the vizierate of Ibn Muqla to al-Muqtadir [928–30]." Dhahabī, Tārīkh,
24:115. The dating of the flight of the followers here is perhaps suspect. One would have
expected these followers to follow him into hiding at the same time as him in 312/924,
instead of during the vizierate of Ibn Muqla to Muqtadir. If we accept this at face value, it
would mean that Shalmaghānī's followers went into hiding at roughly the same time as he
returned to Baghdad.

[90] Ibn al-Athīr notes, "Then [Shalmaghānī] was sought during the vizierate of al-Khāqānī
[924–25/312–13], and he went into hiding and went to Mosul. And he stayed several years
with Nāṣir al-Dawla al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān during the lifetime of his father,
ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān, then he returned to Baghdad and hid." Kāmil, 8:217.

[91] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 193–94.

[92] Ṣafadī, Wāfī, 12:226; Dhahabī, Tārīkh, 24:191. Another report has it that he was released
once Muqtadir was returned to power. ʿArīb, Ṣila, 122.

happened."[93] The context for this statement is obscure,[94] but it gives a sense of Ibn Rawḥ's influence even with the caliph.

 Following the cursing of Shalmaghānī in 312/924, Ibn Rawḥ attempted to discipline Shalmaghānī's followers among the Bisṭāmid family, including two brothers[95] who worked within the ʿAbbasid administration, but these supporters stayed firm. In Shawwāl 322/934, Shalmaghānī decided to emerge from hiding and was arrested, then subjected to an inquisition under the direction of the vizier Ibn Muqla, and executed.[96] Dhahabī tells us that "[Shalmaghānī's] affair was exposed by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ," suggesting that it was at Ibn Rawḥ's behest that Shalmaghānī's heresy was made fully public,[97] while Yāqūt quotes a letter from the caliph Rāḍī which implies that the impetus for the execution had come from the caliph himself.[98]

 According to one account, the proximate cause of Shalmaghānī's execution was the fact that he challenged Ibn Rawḥ to a *mubāhala*: a public contest of religion in which God would indicate who was right and who was wrong, following the model of the Prophet Muḥammad's dispute with the Christians of Najrān, who backed down after the suggestion of such a contest.[99] Ṭūsī describes this as follows:

The reason for [Shalmaghānī's] execution was that when Abū al-Qāsim [Ibn Rawḥ] (RA) made his cursing public (RAA), and his order was broadcast, and he disassociated from him and ordered the Shiʿa to do likewise, [Shalmaghānī] was no longer able to work his deception. So, at a crowded session, attended by the heads of the Shiʿa, in which everyone was telling of Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim's cursing (*laʾn*) of him, and his disassociation (*barāʾa*) from him, [Shalmaghānī] said: "Bring me together with [Ibn Rawḥ] so that I take his hand and he take my hand, and if fire does not descend upon him from heaven to burn him up, then everything he said about me is truth."

[93] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:191.
[94] Massignon interprets this as follows: "Muqtadir was to remain convinced that the abortive coup d'état of 15–16 Muḥarram 317, was a divine warning punishing him for having allowed Ibn Rawḥ to be put in prison in 312." Massignon, *Passion*, 1:319.
[95] Abū Jaʿfar and Abū ʿAlī b. Bisṭām.   [96] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:217–18.
[97] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:115.   [98] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:300.
[99] See Rana Mikati, "Cross My Heart and Hope to Die: A Diachronic Examination of the Mutual Self-cursing (*mubāhala*) in Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 2 (2019): 371–31; Louis Massignon, "La *Mubahala* de Medine et L'Hyperdulie de Fatima," in *Opera minora: Textes recueillis, classés et présentés avec une bibliographie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 1:550–72; Louis Massignon, "La *Mubâhala*. Étude sur la proposition d'ordalie faite par le prophète Muhammad aux chrétiens Balhàrith du Najràn en l'an 10/631 à Médine," *Annuaires de l'École pratique des hautes études* 51 (1942): 5–26.

Then that was reported to [the caliph] al-Rāḍī, because it occurred in the house of [the vizier] Ibn Muqla, and [the caliph] ordered him to seize [Shalmaghānī] and kill him. So, he was killed, and the Shiʿa were relieved of him.[100]

Ibn Rawḥ's motivation for responding to the challenge of Shalmaghānī is clear, but what was Ibn Muqla's interest in this case? The above report suggests that the scandal touched upon him personally as it occurred in his house. Moreover, he was politically entangled in the same networks. Ibn Muqla appears in the histories as an ambitious man and a shrewd political operator who eventually rose to become vizier himself.[101] Years earlier, Ibn Muqla had been a protégé of Ibn al-Furāt, had worked for him during his first vizierate, had gone into hiding upon Ibn al-Furāt's fall,[102] and had returned to the administration during the second vizierate of Ibn al-Furāt. However, when passed over for the high post, he had been anticipating, Ibn Muqla avenged himself by revealing to the caliph's chamberlain that Ibn al-Furāt had stashed more wealth away than he had previously declared.[103] This accusation was one of the elements that led to the fall of Ibn al-Furāt's second vizierate in 306/918, and placed Ibn Muqla firmly into opposition to the Banū al-Furāt.[104] Thus, he served during the vizierate of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, who in turn was under ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's tutelage.[105] When Ibn al-Furāt was returned to the vizierate for his third and final term in 311–12/923–24, he "manifested his displeasure in a way which humiliated Ibn Muqla," and later had him arrested.[106] We do not have explicit references to Ibn Muqla being tortured as many were during the vindictive reprisals of Muḥassin b. al-Furāt, but Ibn Muqla was uncomfortable enough to write to Ibn al-Furāt asking that he be fairly treated, as a result of which, we are told, his bonds were loosened, and his fines were lightened.[107] Given Ibn Muqla's imprisonment under Ibn al-Furāt, we may speculate that Ibn Muqla's execution of Shalmaghānī may well have been related in some way to Shalmaghānī's track record as an enforcer involved in torturing the colleagues of Ibn Muqla.

As for the caliph, by the time Shalmaghānī's inquisition and execution occurred, the long and stormy caliphate of Muqtadir was over, as was the short reign of Qāhir, who was deposed by Ibn Muqla in a coup. Thus it was Muqtadir's son, Rāḍī, placed on the throne by Ibn Muqla in 322/934, who oversaw the inquisition of Shalmaghānī as a very newly minted caliph.[108] Yāqūt transmits the substance of a letter he saw which had been written by

[100] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 253–54.   [101] In 316/928. Kennedy, "Timeline," xi.
[102] Ibn Miskawayh, *Eclipse*, 1:23.   [103] Ibid., 55–56.
[104] Bowen, *Life and Times*, 156–58.   [105] Ibn Miskawayh, *Eclipse*, 1:64.   [106] Ibid., 101.
[107] Ibid., 126.   [108] Kennedy, *Prophet*, 194.

the caliph Rāḍī to the Sāmānid ruler, Naṣr b. Aḥmad, in which we get a sense that the persecution of "heretics" was to be a signature aspect of the new caliph's projection of legitimacy:

When the Commander of the Faithful inherited[109] the inheritance of his relatives (*awliyāʾ*) . . . he emulated their precedents (*sunan*) and acted according to their model in every matter. He guided to the general good (*maṣlaḥa*) and defended against harm, and made a return to Islam and to its people, with advantage, and he set the target which he hoped to hit in its entirety[110] . . . through his intention to pursue this generation of infidels (*hādhihi al-ṭabaqa min al-kuffār*) and to purify the earth from every last trace of them, the libertines, and to examine their affairs, and order that their tracks should be pursued and that he should be informed of what could be verified of their affairs, and of what could be discerned about those who emerge from their masses.

   And it was not long before Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad [Ibn Muqla] the vizier of the Commander of the Faithful ordered the presence of a man called Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī, known as Ibn Abī al-ʿAzāqir. And [Ibn Muqla] informed the Commander of the Faithful that [Shalmaghānī] was one of the despicable, insignificant men among the populace, but was, however, one of the great, notable men among the infidels.[111]

Thus, the interests of Ibn Rawḥ and Ibn Muqla in pursuing Shalmaghānī's inquisition intersected with the interests of the new caliph to pursue an exemplary case and thereby to prove his legitimacy as an Islamic monarch, a claim he was happy to broadcast in this letter to his fellow ruler, the Sāmānid in Central Asia. Another reason that the caliph approved the energetic action taken against Shalmaghānī may have been the fact that his doctrines involved an explicit repudiation both of ʿAbbasid and ʿAlid authority,[112] and more urgently, that both the doctrines and leadership of Shalmaghānī were gaining traction among many of the class of caliphal administrators, including the Banū Bisṭām and a former vizier.[113]

   At the caliph's behest, Ibn Muqla ordered Shalmaghānī's house to be raided and searched,[114] uncovering a cache of letters in which the incarnationist Shalmaghānī was addressed by "phrases with which no human should be addressed."[115] Shalmaghānī attempted to recant, but his followers did not manage to conceal their veneration of him. When summoned for inquisition, one of them, a certain Ibn ʿAbdūs, was persuaded to stretch out his hand and

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[109] As Yāqūt says, he provides an abridged summary (*lakhaṣtu*) of the letter, so it is not clear whether this part is verbatim or not. There is no reason that the caliph should not refer to himself in the third person.
[110] Reading *bi-tatmīmihi*, instead of *tayammumihi*.   [111] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:298–99.
[112] Ibid., 300. See my discussion of the implications of Shalmaghānī's doctrines, below.
[113] See note 89, above.   [114] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:217.   [115] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:115.

slap Shalmaghānī, in order to disprove any belief in his divinity, but another could not bear to disrespect his lord:

As for Ibn Abī ʿAwn, he stretched out his hand toward [Shalmaghānī's] beard and his head, but his hand trembled and he kissed Shalmaghānī's beard and his head, and he said, "My God, my Lord (*sayyid*), and my Sustainer (*rāziq*)!"

And the caliph al-Rāḍī bi-Allāh – for it took place in his presence – said to [Shalmaghānī]: "You have insisted that you do not claim divinity (*ulūhiyya*), so what is this?"

Shalmaghānī responded: "I am not responsible for any of the speech of Ibn Abī ʿAwn, and God knows that I never said to him that I was a god."[116]

The inquisitors, however, were not convinced:

After this [the accused] were ordered to attend several times, as were the jurists and the judges. Finally, the scholars issued the ruling (*aftā*) that his blood was licit, and he was burned with fire in Dhū al-Qaʿda of that year [322/924]. And Ibn Abī ʿAwn was flogged, then he was decapitated, then burnt.[117]

Figure 10 depicts a similar scene of execution, albeit imagined by a much later artist.[118]

FIGURE 10 The execution of Ḥallāj in Baghdad

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 115–16. There are some differences as to the precise form of Shalmaghānī's execution. The earliest states that he was executed at the police station (*majlis al-shurṭa*) on the east bank of Baghdad, and that his legs and arms were cut off, then he was decapitated, then burnt. Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, 1:143.
[118] Ḥallāj was executed in Baghdad a decade before Shalmaghānī, and for similar reasons. This image, of course, does not come from the time. It comes from a manuscript thought

Though Ibn Muqla and the caliph Rāḍī may have responded to a tip-off by Ibn Rawḥ, and doctrinal reasons were certainly part of their motivation, the execution of Shalmaghānī cannot be explained purely by the internal rivalries of the two within the Imami community. The inquisition and execution of Shalmaghānī were enmeshed in a set of overlapping political motivations including the revolving door politics of pro- and anti-Furātid vizierial entourages; the accompanying rhetorical posturing against heterodoxy in an age in which the greatest threats to caliphal security were the depredations of the Qarāmiṭa; the need to establish political legitimacy against scapegoats; and the vindictiveness of political rivals. Ibn Rawḥ operated at the intersection of these various political fields, and proved himself to be a nimble opponent. As Dhahabī notes, Ibn Rawḥ was able to maintain connections with opposing political factions, being visited by "the commanders (umarāʾ) . . . the viziers, those expelled from the vizierate, and the notables,"[119] and using "flattery to defend himself, with phrases that showed off his self-possession, intellect, shrewdness, and knowledge."[120] Apparently, he had not been cowed by his imprisonment or the subsequent violent reprisals that overtook many of his peers, and he continued to attend the ʿAbbasid court to the end of his life. It is unclear exactly what kind of relationship existed between Ibn Rawḥ and Ibn Muqla, but by 325/927 Ibn Rawḥ had the opportunity to save the life of Ibn Muqla, by interceding for him in the chaotic violence that engulfed Baghdad with the struggle between the caliph Rāḍī and the strongmen Ibn Rāʾiq and Bakjam.[121]

IBN RAWḤ AND SHALMAGHĀNĪ: THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE IMAMI COMMUNITY

Having dealt with the broader political context behind the rivalry between Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī, let us turn to the specific dynamics of their political and doctrinal struggle within the Imami community. We have unusually full information about the doctrines of Shalmaghānī both from the Twelver sources (in particular Ṭūsī) and non-Shiʿi sources (especially Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī). I do not intend to give a full dissection of these

to have been copied in 1307 CE, of Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-bāqiya* (*Chronology of Ancient Nations*). The image is provided open-access by Edinburgh University Library, Or. Ms.161, f.94r.

[119] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:190.   [120] Ibid., 191.

[121] Ṣūlī, *Akhbār*, 87; Massignon, *Passion*, 1:320.

doctrines, but some key points are worth highlighting here. Emphasis is placed on the transmission of authority (*waṣiyya*) from the first prophet, Adam, through the rest of the prophets and legatees to the Imams,[122] then down to the current Imamic representatives who were thereby incorporated as links in the transmission of the divine essence into the current world. Before claiming the mantle of divinity for himself, Shalmaghānī seems first to have elevated the envoys as divine hypostases, as we see from the ecstatic veneration directed by Shalmaghānī's follower, the Bisṭāmid matriarch, toward Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of the envoy Abū Jaʿfar.[123]

In some ways, Shalmaghānī's doctrine can be seen as a reassuring response to the perplexity of Occultation. In Shalmaghānī's cosmology, the Occultation of the hidden Imam is something of a nonevent, because even if the Imam is not himself visible, he is accompanied on earth by other hypostases of divinity who are still accessible. Moreover, Shalmaghānī believed that the Imams had no true children, because of the doctrine that such a hypostasis of the divinity could not generate or be generated. This meant that ʿAlid descent was not important: the lineal genetic descent between one Imam and the next was only an appearance. To the extent that they embodied divinity, the *bāb*s and envoys of the current era were therefore fully functionally equal to the Imams of the previous era. This is rather a remarkable rejection of the traditional Shiʿi reverence for the lineal descendants of ʿAlī and is perhaps the reason that both ʿAbbasids and Ṭālibids could be the subject of disassociation by Shalmaghānī:[124] for him their claims to high status were upon the basis of a false association with the Imams. To dispense with the lineal descendants of the Imams is rather a useful solution to the crisis of the Occultation, which was, in the first place, a succession dispute associated with the difficulties of maintaining lineal descent.

Shalmaghānī was also clearly involved in the broader doctrinal interests of the contemporary Imami community. He wrote a *Kitāb al-ghayba*,[125] which probably emphasized the occurrence of presences and absences throughout the hierohistory of the initiatic chain of prophets and Imams, as do some Ismaili hierohistories.[126] He also wrote a *Kitāb al-awṣiyāʾ*,

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[122] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:296.   [123] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 252–53.   [124] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:303.

[125] Apparently, no substantial sections of the work survive. Ansari mentions citations of it, but no actual quotations. *L'imamat*, 219.

[126] Ismaili hierohistories usually refer to these periods with terms like *satr* followed by *kashf* or *ẓuhūr* (e.g. Shin Nomoto, "An Early Ismāʿīlī-Shīʿī Thought on the Messianic Figure (the Qāʾim) according to al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/933–4)," *Orient* 44 (2009): 19–39), but occasionally we see also the use of the term *ghayba*. See, for example, S. M. Stern, "Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī on Persian Religion," in *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 38.

which Hassan Ansari identifies partially[127] with the extant *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* sometimes attributed to Masʿūdī.[128] The extant version of the *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* is structured around the initiatic chain of *waṣiyya* to the present, which, according to Yāqūt, was indeed one of Shalmaghānī's preoccupations, though, it should be said, also the preoccupation of many other Shiʿi groups and thinkers.[129] However, as Ansari notes, the doctrines present in the *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* do not explicitly articulate the kinds of incarnationism mentioned by Yāqūt, except perhaps in an attenuated form.[130]

What kind of authority did Shalmaghānī claim for himself? Our sources are somewhat contradictory, due either to the progressive development of his claims, or because of a misunderstanding of his incarnationist cosmology. Thus, it is said that he claimed divine dominion (*rubūbiyya*),[131] though he also appears in some accounts to subordinate himself to the envoy for the hidden Imam. Though contradictory on the face of it, these details might be reconciled in terms of a cosmology which accepted a potential conflation between the various hypostases of the divine persons, in which Imam and *bāb* are aspects of the same divine essence. The Nuṣayrīs also subscribed to this kind of cosmology, and as we have seen Shalmaghānī's doctrines were considered to be very similar to those of the Nuṣayrīs,[132] though it is very possible that this similarity was overemphasized by hostile sources.

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[127] The completion of the extant text is dated to after Shalmaghānī's demise to AH 332. Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, 286.

[128] "Des citations du *Kitāb al-Awṣiyāʾ* d'al-Shalmaghānī se retrouvent dans d'autres sources et il paraît fort probable que le *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* attribué à l'historien al-Masʿūdī ne soit qu'une paraphrase de ce livre augmentée de nombreux ajouts." Ansari, *L'imamat*, 136.

[129] Ansari, "*Kitāb al-Waṣiyya*"; Najam Haider, "The *Waṣiyya* of Abū Hāshim: The Impact of Polemic in Premodern Muslim Historiography," in *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook*, ed. Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, and Michael Bonner (Leiden, Brill: 2011), 49–84; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "The Pre-existence of the Imam," in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 133–68.

[130] Ansari, *L'imamat*, 84n396. Ansari also notes a doctrinal similarity with Ibn Rustam's *Dalāʾil*.

[131] Shalmaghānī's followers believed he incarnated God, just as the prophets and Imams and their *waṣī*s had incarnated God one after the other since the beginning of the world. Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:296–97.

[132] Ibid., 301. In Ibn Rawḥ's anathema rescript against Shalmaghānī, his heresy is explicitly linked to those of renegade *bāb*s going back to the time of Hādī. However, not all of those named in this rescript are doctrinally similar to Shalmaghānī: Sharīʿī and Ibn Nuṣayr (al-Namīrī) probably were, but Hilālī and Bilālī do not seem to have been. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 257.

Shalmaghānī's cosmological framework was, according to the evidence provided by Yāqūt, of a pentadist (*mukhamissa*) orientation,[133] in which the divinity (*ulūhiyya*) manifested itself in human history in five persons which would become incarnated in a succession of historical figures, most famously in ʿAlī, Muḥammad, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. After being manifested, these five persons would be occulted (*ghāba*) before manifesting again in a new pentad. A distinctive element of Shalmaghānī's formulation of this doctrinal complex is the fact that he is said to have placed ʿAlī above Muḥammad in the hierarchy of divine hypostases,[134] an orientation known to heresiographical systematisers as ʿAlyāʾiyya[135] or sometimes ʿAyniyya (the *ʿayn* standing for ʿAlī, as opposed to the Mīmiyya placing Muḥammad at the top of the pentad).[136] Also noteworthy is Shalmaghānī's theory that the five persons of this divine pentad are always accompanied by a corresponding set of "opposites" (*ḍidd*) or Iblīses, whose function is to indicate the divine Truth.[137] This conception of the "opposite" becomes important in understanding Shalmaghānī's response to his cursing by Ibn Rawḥ, and his challenge to a *mubāhala* contest.

THE POLITICS OF EXCOMMUNICATION

While we know something of Shalmaghānī's doctrines, the development of these doctrines, the exact nature of his relations with the Shiʿa, and the timing of his activities are less clear. By the time Ibn Rawḥ went to prison in 312/924, he had appointed Shalmaghānī as his agent, and he may have appointed him several years earlier when he went into hiding, as suggested by a report from Abū Ghālib, in which Shalmaghānī is clearly, and apparently without conflict, depicted as acting as the fully legitimate agent of Ibn Rawḥ:

I came to Kufa . . . in the days of Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ (RA) and his concealment (*istitārihi*) and his appointment (*naṣb*) of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, known as al-Shalmaghānī, who was then righteous (*mustaqīm*), and the heresy (*kufr* and *ilḥād*) which was to emerge from him had not yet emerged, and the people went to him and met with him because he was the companion (*ṣāḥib*) of

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[133] Rodrigo Adem, "Early Ismailism and the Gates of Religious Authority: Genealogizing the Theophanic Secrets of Early Esoteric Shiʿism," in *Reason, Esotericism and the Construction of Authority in Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Rodrigo Adem and Edmund Hayes (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Halm, *Gnosis*, 218–25; Asatryan, *Controversies*, 154–55.

[134] Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 8:219.   [135] Halm, *Gnosis*, 225–30.

[136] Adem, "Early Ismailism."   [137] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:301.

Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ, and an envoy (safīr)[138] between them and him in his needs and important affairs.[139]

This account is said to date to the days of the "concealment" of Ibn Rawḥ. This may evoke the old idea of the hidden agents of the hidden Imam, or it may refer to his relations with the ʿAbbasid government, implying that even before he was imprisoned, he went into hiding. There are no clear accounts of this in other sources, but Dhahabī confirms Ibn Rawḥ's difficulties during the vizierate of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, 306–11/918–23.[140] It is probable that these difficulties came to an end with the third vizierate of Ibn al-Furāt, in which case it makes sense that Ibn Rawḥ's imprisonment coincided with the final fall of Ibn al-Furāt in 312/924. As we have seen, the fall of Ibn al-Furāt prompted Shalmaghānī to go into hiding himself, and he later traveled to Mosul to avoid reprisals. When operating as Ibn Rawḥ's agent, it is likely that he did so in Baghdad before he left for Mosul, or perhaps he only felt the need to go into hiding sometime after Ibn Rawḥ's imprisonment.

Abū Ghālib's report unambiguously depicts Shalmaghānī as a legitimate agent before his apostasy. However, this impression was not universal. Abū ʿAlī b. Hammām[141] denies that Shalmaghānī was ever appointed:

Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Hammām [reported] that Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī was never the bāb of Abū al-Qāsim, nor the path to him, nor did Abū al-Qāsim appoint him to that position in any way or in any connection, and whoever says otherwise lies.[142] Instead Shalmaghānī was a jurist (faqīh) from our jurists, but he fell into contaminated doctrines (khallaṭa).[143]

However, Ibn Hammām is not an impartial witness, for he was the man whom Ibn Rawḥ appointed as his agent to replace Shalmaghānī, and who issued the rescript cursing Shalmaghānī. In denying that Shalmaghānī ever had such a pivotal role in the nāḥiya, Ibn Hammām was thereby defending his own legitimacy.

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[138] The language Abū Ghālib uses to describe Shalmaghānī's office of mediation is interesting. Not only is he called his companion or agent (ṣāḥib), but he receives the term envoy (safīr).

[139] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 190–91.   [140] Dhahabī, Tārīkh, 24:191.

[141] As we have seen Ibn Hammām played a crucial role in disseminating information about the canonized envoys, including being the first source we have to assert Abū Jaʿfar's appointment through naṣṣ designation. Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 248.

[142] It is perhaps because of this judgment that Abū Ghālib is given negative judgments in the rijāl literature. Ansari also notes a Wāqifī connection. L'imamat, 57–58.

[143] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 255.

It must have been very soon after he was sent to prison that Ibn Rawḥ learned of Shalmaghānī's heresy and cursed him. The date of 312/924 is firmly established across our sources, allowing us to be confident that this is when the major split between Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī occurred. Many reports of the cursing of Shalmaghānī seem to share an interest in the physical process of the production, dictation, dissemination, and preservation of the document.[144] We are told that it was transmitted in the name of the hidden Imam by Ibn Rawḥ to Ibn Hammām, who emphasizes the immediacy of the direct link to the Imam by saying that when he received it, "the ink was still fresh, not yet dry." Ibn Hammām thereafter dictated it to others[145] to ensure its controlled dissemination. One of the transmitters of the cursing rescript goes on to emphasize the process of widespread distribution:

Abū ʿAlī [b. Hammām] took this rescript and did not leave any of the shaykhs without reading it to him. And afterward, copies of it were sent by the shaykhs to the rest of the cities (amṣār), and that became famous in the community (ṭāʾifa) and the community made a consensus to curse him and disassociate from him.[146]

This shows us how individual community leaders were chosen as nodes for the transmission of Imamic statements to the wider community. The widespread dissemination of the cursing appears to have been the final culmination of a gradual and targeted process. As the case of Fāris b. Ḥātim under Imam Hādī shows us, the cursing and excommunication of an agent was a ticklish business which was to be approached by carefully building targeted support against the agent before publicizing the excommunication more widely.

THE DEIFICATION OF THE ENVOY'S DAUGHTER

Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of Abū Jaʿfar, provides us with an account in which the cursing and excommunication of Shalmaghānī proceeds in several successive stages.[147] She recounts her direct involvement in the case, because,

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[144] The interest in the physical details of production and preservation are taken yet further in the version which appears in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*, in which the transmitters have made sure to take note of all the variants between two versions which were transmitted, producing something like a premodern critical edition. It is interesting to ponder whether the variants in the text of the anathema were due to slightly different versions sent out by Ibn Rawḥ to different recipients, or to the process of transmission thereafter. Ibid., 257.

[145] Ibid., 256.   [146] Ibid., 257.

[147] Unfortunately, none of these stages is dated, though the general suggestion of the narrative flow is that they all occurred in the year of the anathema, 312/934, or soon after.

as she complained to Ibn Rawḥ, Shalmaghānī's followers worshipped her as the embodiment of the spirit (rūḥ) of Fāṭima, and therefore one of the hypostases of the divine pentad. In this account, the stages of excommunication appear first narrowly targeted, and then become wider in impact and more publicly disseminated. This account provides rich detail regarding both the concrete implications of Shalmaghānī's preaching, and also the institutional responses of the envoy, and so I will quote it at length. The account starts as follows:[148]

The old lady, Umm Kulthūm bt. Abī Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī said (RAA): Abū Jaʿfar b. Abī al-ʿAzāqir [Shalmaghānī] was a leader for the Bisṭām family (kāna ... wajīhan ʿinda banī bisṭām), and that is why Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim [b. Rawḥ] (RATAA) had given him rank and station among the people.[149]

This suggests that the appointment of Shalmaghānī was based on strategic political concerns: he was able to ensure the support of another powerful family. The report continues:

Then, at the time of his apostasy (irtidād) [Shalmaghānī] transmitted every kind of lie and wretchedness and unbelief (kufr) to the Bisṭām family, and attributed it (yusniduhu) to Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim and they accepted it from him and took it from him, until it was disclosed to Abū al-Qāsim (RAA), who denounced it, and declared it to be a greatly weighty matter, and he forbade the Bisṭām family from talking to[150] [Shalmaghānī] and ordered them to curse him and disassociate from him. However, they did not desist, but continued to maintain his leadership (tawallī).[151]

The reason for the Banū Bisṭām's continued trust in Shalmaghānī, in spite of the cursing, is then explained:

That was because Shalmaghānī used to say to them, "Indeed, I have broadcast the secret, although hiding was incumbent upon me, and so I have been punished with ostracism (ibʿād) after being specially favored, because the matter (amr) is great, unsupportable, except for an angel brought near (malak muqarrab) or a messenger prophet (nabī mursal) or a tested believer (muʾmin mumtaḥan)[152] and the greatness of the matter, and his high glory is affirmed in their hearts."[153]

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[148] Transmitted by Ibn Barniya.   [149] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 252.
[150] ʿan kalāmihi. This could perhaps be read as "from his doctrines," but I have preferred the above reading because the primary context in the rest of this phrase is of social ostracism.
[151] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 252.
[152] This recalls a famous Imamic hadith which alludes to an elite initiatic dimension in Shiʿism. Amir-Moezzi, Spirituality, 293.
[153] Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 252.

Here Shalmaghānī is tapping into tropes present also in *ghulāt* literature, that the great sin lies in revealing the doctrine.[154] It seems plausible that everything up until this moment took place while Ibn Rawḥ was in prison, as he does not seem to have been able to act to counter Shalmaghānī's preaching. It is notable, too, that up to this point, the cursing issued by Ibn Rawḥ seems to have been targeted at the Bisṭām family, and designed to persuade them to reject him and his doctrines. However, when they accepted Shalmaghānī's interpretations of the cursing, Ibn Rawḥ decided to make the excommunication more general, extending also to any who associated with him:

And this reached Abū al-Qāsim (RAA), and he wrote to the Bisṭām family to curse him and disassociate from him and from whoever followed him in his doctrines and continued to acknowledge his leadership.[155]

Thus, anyone who associated with the excommunicated was also to suffer the same fate. This kind of staged extension of the circles of the excommunicated through "contagion" is familiar also from late antique and medieval Christian attempts to weaponize excommunication as an effective tool of religiopolitical discipline.[156] Though Ibn Rawḥ's decision caused consternation among the Bisṭām family Shalmaghānī was able to argue them around:

And when this arrived to them, they informed [Shalmaghānī] of it and he wept a lot, then said:

"This statement [of Ibn Rawḥ] has a great esoteric dimension: which is that the 'cursing' refers to 'distancing' (*ibʿād*) so that the meaning of his statement, 'May God curse him,' means 'May God distance him (*bāʿadahu Allāh*)[157] from punishment and hellfire.' And now I know my rank (*manzilatī*)." And he rubbed his cheeks in the dirt (*marragha khadayhi ʿalā al-turāb*) and said, "Concealment (*kitmān*) of this matter (*amr*) is incumbent upon you."[158]

It is notable that at this point, Shalmaghānī still does not proclaim any hostility toward Ibn Rawḥ, but continues to attempt to harmonize his

[154] Tendler Krieger, "Rehabilitating the Heresiarchs."   [155] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 252.

[156] For the relation between targeted and more "contagious" excommunications, see the introduction to Elizabeth Vodola's *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), and in the index under "contagion of excommunication."

[157] Here Shalmaghānī produces an exegesis from a relatively firm lexicographical foundation. One of the meanings of *laʿn*, usually translated as "cursing," is, indeed, distancing. My thanks to Peter Webb for pointing this out to me.

[158] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 252.

actions with Ibn Rawḥ's through the means of esoteric (*bāṭinī*) exegesis. In spite of Shalmaghānī's insistence on the necessity of maintaining silence, his doctrines continue to leak out, including to Umm Kulthūm herself:

The old lady [Umm Kulthūm] (RAA) said: I informed Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim that the mother of Abū Jaʿfar b. Bisṭām spoke to me one day, after having entered, kissed me, glorified me, and having gone too far in glorifying me to the extent that she prostrated herself at my feet in order to kiss them. I forbade her from doing that. I said to her, "Desist, madam! For this is a weighty matter."

But she threw herself upon my hand[159] and cried, then she said, "How can I not do this to you when you are my lady (*mawlātī*) Fāṭima?!"

And I said to her, "And how is that, madam (*sittī*)?!"

She said to me, "The Shaykh (meaning Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī [Shalmaghānī]) issued the secret to us."

She [Umm Kulthūm] said: I said to her, "And what is the secret?"

She said, "He has extracted from us [a promise] to conceal it, and I am afraid lest I should broadcast it and be punished."

[Umm Kulthūm] said: I gave her a promise that I would not reveal it to anyone, but I promised within myself to make an exception for the Shaykh (RAA) (meaning Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ).

[The Bisṭāmid matriarch] said, "Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar [Shalmaghānī] said to us that the soul (*rūḥ*) of the Prophet of God (SAAS) transmigrated to your father (that is, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān) (RAA), and the soul of the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī (AS) transmigrated to the body of Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ, and the soul of Fāṭima (AS) transmigrated to you. So how should I not glorify you, O our lady?!"

And I [Umm Kulthūm] said to her, "Cease! Do not do it! For these are lies, madam."

She said to me, "A great secret, and we were made to promise not to reveal this to anyone, may God help me! May punishment not fall to me (*lā yaḥullu lī al-ʿadhāb*)![160] O my lady, if you had not persuaded me to reveal it, I would not have revealed it to you, nor to anyone else!"[161]

When Umm Kulthūm reports back to Ibn Rawḥ he indicates that the Bisṭāmid matriarch should be cut off from contact with the Imamic

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[159] Reading *yadī*, instead of *yadihi*.

[160] *Lā yaḥullu lī al-ʿadhāb* follows the reading of the *Ghayba* edition edited by Aghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī and Muḥammad Muḥsin (Nafaj/Tehran: Maktabat nīnavā al-ḥaydariyya, 1385/1965), 249. The implication here is that the Bisṭāmid matriarch, though not so high in the divine hierarchy as Umm Kulthūm, does herself incarnate something of the divine essence, and therefore cannot be punished in her divine aspect. Thanks to Peter Webb and Geert Jan van Gelder for their comments on this passage.

[161] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 252–53.

institutions. In this way, as Ibn Rawḥ had threatened, his targeted excommunication of the source of the heresy is extended to a more general excommunication of the Bisṭāmid followers of the heresy:

O daughter, beware of going to this woman after what emerged from her and do not accept [to convey] a note (ruqʿa) from her if she corresponds with you, nor a messenger if she sends him to you, and do not meet her after her statement, for this is a denial of God (kufr bi-Allāh) (T) and heresy (ilḥād) which this accursed man has fixed in the hearts of that people so as to make a path for him to say to them that God (T) has united with him and incarnated in him, as the Christians say about the Messiah (AS), and to head toward the doctrines of al-Ḥallāj (God's curse be upon him).[162]

Umm Kulthūm affirms that she did indeed carry out this excommunication of the Bisṭāmids:

So, I kept away (hajartu) from the Bisṭām family and I abandoned visiting them and I did not accept excuses from them, and I did not meet their mother after that.[163]

Initial communications over this matter seem to have been conducted purely with the Bisṭāmid family in an attempt to secure their recantation from Shalmaghānī's doctrines. Once these overtures failed, the excommunication was communicated more generally, presumably to prevent the contagion that had reached the Bisṭāmids spreading further:

And the report spread among the Nawbakht family, and no one was left without Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim engaging him and corresponding with him, to curse Abū Jaʿfar al-Shalmaghānī and disassociate (barāʾa) from him and from anyone who acknowledged [Shalmaghānī's] leadership or who was satisfied with his statements or spoke to him, let alone following him.[164]

The excommunication was thereafter systematically disseminated across the community.[165]

WHAT DID SHALMAGHĀNĪ'S CLAIMS HAVE TO DO WITH THE ENVOYSHIP?

Scholars have suggested that Shalmaghānī was primarily interested in adopting the position of envoy, taking advantage of the imprisonment of Ibn Rawḥ to do so.[166] However, while Shalmaghānī's doctrines conflicted with Ibn Rawḥ's this

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[162] Ibid., 253.   [163] Ibid.   [164] Ibid.   [165] Ibid., 257.
[166] Abdulsater notes, "al-Shalmaghānī presented himself as the Safīr of the hidden Imam." "Dynamics," 318. Arjomand states barely, "Shalmaghani then fell out with Ibn Ruh and claimed deputyship of the hidden imam for himself." "Crisis," 507. Arjomand also cites

does not mean he claimed to be an envoy. When read carefully, the evidence of the sources presents a more complex development in the claims of Shalmaghānī, which do not suggest that he simply wished to replace Ibn Rawḥ as envoy. As we have seen from Umm Kulthūm's account, Shalmaghānī did not initially express a direct challenge to Ibn Rawḥ, for his claims were not directly comparable to the kind of authority which Ibn Rawḥ was asserting.[167] Shalmaghānī, in fact, appears to have affirmed Ibn Rawḥ's high status, but gave it a radically different meaning, suggesting that the envoy was a pseudo-prophetic figure, part of the initiatic chain, and one of the hypostases of the divinity. Though Umm Kulthūm does not say so, other sources state that Shalmaghānī claimed that he himself embodied the divinity,[168] which would seem to suggest that he claimed that he was one part of the pentad. Umm Kulthūm gives us information from the Bisṭāmid matriarch about which living figures represented which persons of the divine pentad (Table 5).[169]

Where is Shalmaghānī in this pantheon? Umm Kulthūm does not indicate whether Shalmaghānī assigned himself a position within the divine pentad or not. One possibility is that Shalmaghānī claimed for himself the role of the

TABLE 5 The incarnation of the divine pentad proposed by Shalmaghānī by 312/924

Archetype of the soul (*rūḥ*)	Current incarnation
Soul of the Prophet Muḥammad	Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān[170]
Soul of ʿAlī	Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ
Soul of Fāṭima	Umm Kulthūm bt. Abī Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī
Soul of Ḥasan	Not specified
Soul of Ḥusayn	Not specified

the report that Ḥallāj, too, claimed to be the agent of the hidden Imam, suggesting that this illuminates the claims of Shalmaghānī but without clearly indicating what the similarities and differences in these two cases might be.

[167] This does not mean a harmonization could not have been effected. See, for example, Khaṣībī's harmonization of the fiscal authority of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī and Ibn Nuṣayr's spiritual authority, discussed above.

[168] See above.   [169] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 252–53.

[170] It is not clear what happened following the death of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī. His spirit (and therefore the spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad) was probably understood to have "occulted" (*ghāba*), as described by Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:301. It is also possible that the spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad (=Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī) was immediately reincarnated in another individual, perhaps even Shalmaghānī himself? However, even this would not have been a direct threat to Ibn Rawḥ, for we are told that Shalmaghānī was of the ʿAyniyya orientation seeing ʿAlī as superior to Muḥammad. Ibid., 302.

"opposite" (ḍidd), whose role was to indicate by his apparent opposition, the spiritual authority of the prophet or Imam (walī) as Pharaoh did for Moses, and Abū Bakr and Muʿāwiya did for Muḥammad and ʿAlī.[171] This idea of the "opposite" corresponds to Yāqūt's testimony. Yāqūt mentions a sequence of Satans or "Iblīses" as having provided foils for the divine manifestations of the pentad at each successive incarnation throughout history.[172] However, according to Umm Kulthūm's account, Shalmaghānī did not initially mention this idea of the "opposite," or at least, he did not connect it with himself. It is possible that the cosmological positioning of Shalmaghānī developed through his conflict with Ibn Rawḥ. His excommunication required explication for his followers, and the concept of the "opposite," which was presumably already present in his cosmology, was available to explain the problem. If we accept the idea that Shalmaghānī developed gradually toward the recognition of himself as the "opposite" it would explain why the first interpretations of the cursing that Umm Kulthūm ascribes to Shalmaghānī[173] do not mention the "opposite." The explanations she records were perhaps the first, but not the final attempts to make sense of this traumatic split between the divine envoy and his agent.[174] The idea of Shalmaghānī as the divine envoy's "opposite" also makes sense of Shalmaghānī's apparently suicidal call for a *mubāhala* contest. Through this act, Shalmaghānī "the opposite" may well have been aiming to intensify the opposition between himself and Ibn Rawḥ the divine envoy. In claiming to be the "opposite," Shalmaghānī would not thereby have excluded himself from divinity, but even may have been considered as more crucial than the divine pentad.[175] The event of the *mubāhala* is narrated as follows by Ibn Rawḥ's loyal agent Ibn Hammām:

Shalmaghānī sent a message to Ibn Rawḥ asking him to do a *mubāhala*[176] contest with him, saying, "I am the representative of the Imam (ṣāḥib al-rajul)[177] and he has

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[171] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 254–55.   [172] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:301–3.

[173] Punishment for revealing the secret; and the semantic reinterpretation of *laʿn* as "distancing" from hellfire. See above.

[174] It is, of course, possible that these were Umm Kulthūm's misunderstandings, or just polemical elaborations, or that Shalmaghānī proposed multiple different interpretations for the excommunication simultaneously.

[175] As we are told, he believed that, "The indicator of the Truth is superior to the Truth, and the opposite is closer to the thing than its appearance (*shibh*)." Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:301; Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 254.

[176] The choice of this contest was not accidental. The original contest featured the *ahl al-kisāʾ*, who were key aspects of the divine pentad for the *mukhammisa*, and so it would have held a special symbolic significance for Shalmaghānī and his followers. For details of the context of the original contest between Muḥammad and the Christians of Najrān, and its interpretation and significance in Shiʿism, see W. Schmucker, "Mubahala," *EI2*; Massignon, "La Mubâhala." See also Adem, "Early Ismailism."

[177] *Al-rajul* (literally, "the man") is one of the common terms for the Imam in early Shiʿi texts.

ordered me to make the knowledge manifest, and so I have made it manifest in its esoteric (*bāṭin*) and its exterior (*ẓāhir*) aspects. So do the *mubāhala* with me."

And the Shaykh [Ibn Rawḥ] sent him the response: "Whichever of us goes ahead of his companion will be vanquished (*makhṣūm*)."[178]

And al-ʿAzāqirī [Shalmaghānī] went first and he was killed and crucified . . . and that was in the year 323.[179]

It is notable, here, that Shalmaghānī is depicted as claiming to be the Imam's designated representative, in contrast to Umm Kulthūm's testimony. But even so, the contest between them does not appear to be a simple case of two men fighting over the same job. Shalmaghānī claims to be the Imam's "*ṣāḥib*," a frustratingly unspecific word, which seems to mean "representative" here,[180] and so may express rivalry to Ibn Rawḥ's position. In his assertion that his role is to make the truth publicly manifest, Shalmaghānī may be referring to the role of the Iblīs whose function is to draw attention to the role of the divine hypostasis, which would be achieved through his defeat in the *mubāhala*, and so again this event need not be read as a simple rivalry between two men for dominance. Of course, Ibn Rawḥ does not see things this way, and his laconic response to Shalmaghānī suggests he is more than willing to allow the man he deems as a dangerous rival to immolate himself for his religious principles.

REVEALING THE SECRET

The actions of both Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī were implicated in an old dilemma for the Shiʿa: to expose or not to expose the truth.[181] While Shalmaghānī embraced the exposure, Ibn Rawḥ publicized the issue warily:

Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ went back on his decision to avoid exposing [Shalmaghānī] for he was in the hands of the people [the ʿAbbasids] and in their prison, so he

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[178] Thanks to Geert Jan van Gelder for his helpful comments on the translation of this passage.

[179] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 193–94. This date is in variance with other datings which agree on this occurring at the end of 322.

[180] It is also used in this sense in the report quoted above from Abū Ghālib, in which Shalmaghānī is described as Ibn Rawḥ's "companion (*ṣāḥib*) and his emissary (*safīr*) between [the Shiʿa] and [Ibn Rawḥ] in his needs and important affairs." Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 190.

[181] Tendler Krieger, "Rehabilitating the Heresiarchs"; Kohlberg, "*Taqiyya*"; Hodgson, "Early Shîʿa."

ordered the exposure [of Shalmaghānī], and for [us] not to be afraid but to be safe.[182]

This represents a parallel to Shalmaghānī's acknowledgment, in Umm Kulthūm's story, that broadcasting the secrets of the Shiʿa was to be avoided.[183] In this statement, Ibn Rawḥ is depicted as acknowledging that, in general, even heterodox Shiʿa would normally be protected from exposure by a bond of *omertà*. Ibn Rawḥ feels he has to justify the fact that he took the step because his hands were tied, and he could not exert the necessary pressure on Shalmaghānī from his palace-prison. Again, this points to the political dimension of the pronunciation of the excommunication, which crucially transformed the way in which doctrinal differences were addressed.

THE CHAIN OF LEGATION (*WAṢIYYA*)

As I have discussed in Chapter 5, one of the innovative elements in the rise of the envoys was their appropriation of the Imamic protocols of *naṣṣ* designation and the *waṣiyya* chain of legation as elements in the legitimation of the envoyship. These do not appear to have been attached to the agents of the Imam before the Occultation, but are prominent in connection with Abū Jaʿfar.[184] It is possible, also, that the new application of the quasi-Imamic concepts of *naṣṣ* and *waṣiyya* represent the flirting with an esotericist genealogy of authority which did not rely upon direct Imamic designation. As we have seen, Shalmaghānī's conceptions of authority certainly did not rely on Imamic designation, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the envoys adopted the vocabulary of *waṣiyya* at a time when it was being worked out in its esoteric hierohistorical dimensions by their collaborator. A further piece of evidence for this kind of inflation of the hierohistorical position of the envoys is the investiture of Ibn Rawḥ's succession by Dhukāʾ the eunuch. His symbolic act of handing over a staff and the Imams' signet rings to Ibn Rawḥ upon his accession indicated that his envoyship was to be understood as more than just mere bureaucratic mediation, but was legitimated directly through the protocols of Imamic succession. While Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī were at loggerheads, they sprung from the same community, they were collaborators before they became foes, and they were appealing to common

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[182] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 256.   [183] See above.
[184] Note the discussion above, about the *thiqa* hadith, and the later conceptualizations of Abū Jaʿfar's authority.

constituencies of Imamis. While Ibn Rawḥ may not have subscribed to doctrines like those of Shalmaghānī, some of his supporters did, as we see in the adoption of pro-envoy positions in Nuṣayrī works analyzed above. But any conceptual common ground between the rivals was less likely to be admitted following Shalmaghānī's execution, and especially following the canonization of the idea of envoy in later generations, when any connection between the envoys and the "heretics" had to be erased. The spectacular publicity given to Shalmaghānī's case may have influenced the eventual consensus to deny the possibility of any more envoys or *bāb*s after Ibn Rawḥ's death.

IBN RAWḤ: SCHOLARLY CREDENTIALS OR INSTITUTIONAL IMPRIMATUR?

While Ibn Rawḥ may have flirted with a charismatic-esotericist basis for his authority, he continued to assert his leadership through the exoteric institutions of Imamate, including answering petitions and legal and theological responsa (*masāʾil*). There were also attempts to establish his credentials as a scholar, probably retrospectively. His claim to authority upon these bases was doubly complicated by his association with Shalmaghānī. Shalmaghānī was not only a charismatic figure and Ibn Rawḥ's erstwhile agent, but he was also a far greater scholar than Ibn Rawḥ. His books were so influential that they could not be ignored, even after his excommunication and execution, but instead had to be rehabilitated by explicit statements from Ibn Rawḥ, denying or minimizing Shalmaghānī's input.[185]

Ibn Rawḥ was an intelligent man, and Dhahabī notes that Ibn Rawḥ gave legal and theological judgments (*aftā*) to the community,[186] something that is borne out by the collection of responsa (*masāʾil*) ascribed to him. But was he a scholar, in the sense of an author of books or original intellectual output? Some reports suggest that rather than issuing from his own scholarly efforts, his responses to the community were produced by managing subordinates within the Imamic institution. Ibn Rawḥ would then provide the Imamic imprimatur to legitimate the knowledge produced.[187] Throughout the early Occultation, the agents of the *nāḥiya*

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[185] See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 255–56; Arjomand, "Crisis," 507, n140.
[186] Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 24:191.
[187] The fact that we can see this process in action is an important case for the understanding of the operation of Imamic knowledge in contexts where the process is not so visible, in earlier periods and other contexts like the Fatimid case.

relied upon a certain equivocation about the origin of the individual answers sent to the community, while asserting the general Imamic underpinning of their institutions as a whole. The split with Shalmaghānī threatened to break up this system of collective responsibility, and the reports from this period show the fracture points between the authority of the envoys and his underlings. In one report, Abū Ghālib refers to Shalmaghānī as "the mediator (*wāsiṭa*) between us and al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ (RAA)."[188] However, it is not clear to Abū Ghālib or his peers exactly who within the Imamic institution their messages were answered by. Abū Ghālib brings a petition note to Shalmaghānī in Baghdad, waits a few days, and then becomes anxious when there is no reply. His friend reassures him suggesting that it is best for the response to be delayed: "I prefer it because when the response is prompt, it originates from al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ, and if it takes a while, then it comes from the lord (*al-ṣāḥib*)."[189] Clearly, the time of Shalmaghānī's agentship was a moment of anxiety, and as in earlier phases of the Occultation, the community could not be entirely clear whether their letters were really being answered by the Imam, the envoy, or one of the envoy's secretaries and representatives. There are several other instances in which the question is raised as to whether knowledge was issued from Shalmaghānī, Ibn Rawḥ, or from the Imam himself, suggesting that this was a widespread concern.[190]

Ibn Rawḥ does not appear to have had much scholarly output. In order to meet the problem of Ibn Rawḥ's apparent lack of scholarly credentials, we see later transmitters scraping the bottom of the barrel to show evidence of scholarship. Thus Ibn Bābūya includes a peculiar report in his *Kamāl al-dīn* regarding Abū Ṭālib's conversion to Islam due to lettrist-numerological proofs, otherwise unrelated to the content of the chapter, suggesting it was only included as a way of indicating that Ibn Rawḥ did indeed preserve hadith reports.[191] The fact that some of the Shiʿa

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[188] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 191–93.   [189] Ibid.

[190] In one report, Ibn Rawḥ is seen to miraculously intuit this doubt, and respond to these concerns. Following Ibn Rawḥ's issuance of response to a theological question, "Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Isḥāq (RAA) said, 'I returned to Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ (may God sanctify his secret) on the next day, thinking to myself, "I wonder if what he said yesterday was from himself?" But [Ibn Rawḥ] spontaneously anticipated me and said, "O Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm … is it preferable for me to make statements regarding God's religion based on my opinion, or from myself?! Rather that is from the source (*aṣl*) and heard from the proof (*ḥujja*)."'" Ibid., 203.

[191] Ibn Bābūya, *Kamal*, 509. Perhaps the very obscurity of such a report was a point of pride for transmitters who prized Imamic knowledge of whatever kind. For the social prestige of transmitting various kinds of hadith, see Garrett Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years* (Leiden:

questioned the preeminent scholar and theologian Abū Sahl about why he had not been chosen to lead the community,[192] suggests that, in terms of knowledge at least, there were others considered more suitable to lead. In some reports, there is doubt about the provenance of responsa issued by Ibn Rawḥ, leading him to issue an explicit statement denying that Shalmaghānī authored the responsa as had been claimed.[193]

By contrast, Shalmaghānī's scholarly output was voluminous and important. One indication of this is in the efforts made by Ibn Rawḥ and his colleagues to ensure that Shalmaghānī's scholarly output could be rehabilitated from the stain of his extremist claims: as one questioner asks, how should people act toward Shalmaghānī's work, when their houses are filled with his books? Ibn Rawḥ responded that one should act as the Imams did with regards to doctrinally unsound scholars in the past: use the hadiths they transmit from the Imams, but leave what they generate from their own speculation.[194] However, more robust efforts were made, for we are also told that Ibn Rawḥ wrote to a group of jurists in Qumm to elicit their reaction to a work of Shalmaghānī's called *Kitāb al-taʾdīb* to see if it was doctrinally and legally sound, after which the scholars wrote back with only very minor technical objections.[195] Ṭūsī also mentions that Ibn Rawḥ sanctioned the contents of Shalmaghānī's *Kitāb al-taklīf*, after having excised inappropriate passages, and it was then ordered to be copied and distributed. This suggests that not only did Ibn Rawḥ exercise doctrinal control over the community but that there was an institutional framework for correcting, submitting, and distributing the corrected texts.[196] Ibn Rawḥ was perhaps not a great scholar in his own right, but he directed an institutional mechanism for authorizing texts through Imamic imprimatur. This bespeaks a relatively high level of knowledge about these subjects, and an ability to coordinate.

THE DEATH OF IBN RAWḤ AND THE TESTING OF SAMURĪ

Shalmaghānī famously described his conflict with Ibn Rawḥ in the following terms: "We contended over this matter as dogs squabble over a corpse."[197] After such an undignified and divisive squabble, one can

Brill, 2020). Little work has been carried out on the wider context of magic and the occult within the early Imami community, in spite of the prominence of the ascription of magical texts to a purported follower of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq: Jābir b. Ḥayyān. P. Kraus and M. Plessner, "Djābir b. Ḥayyān," *EI2*.
[192] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 243.   [193] Ibid., 232.   [194] Ibid., 242.   [195] Ibid., 243.
[196] Ibid., 242.   [197] Ibid., 244.

understand why Shalmaghānī considered the institutions of the Imamate as dead and unsalvageable. It was not very many years before the elite of the Shiʿi community came to the same consensus. Ibn Rawḥ died four years after Shalmaghānī, in 326/938, and was succeeded by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, who himself died three years after that.[198] While the canonical Twelver sources tend to emphasize reports which together suggest a core of consensus for the line of designation through the four canonical envoys, Khaṣībī preserves an alternative picture of the dissent among the community:[199]

And al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī appointed Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī to succeed him, and the Shiʿa argued about him. Some of them said that Ibn Rawḥ appointed him the heir to his property and his money due to the incapacity of his son Abū Ṭālib to rise to that. And others said,[200] "No, rather Ibn Rawḥ appointed [al-Samurī] in the [same] way that Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān appointed [Ibn Rawḥ] to succeed him." And the Shiʿa cross-examined (ṭālaba) ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī in the way that they cross-examined al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ, but they mentioned that [al-Samurī] was incapable of doing that.[201]

The debate here revolves around the familiar association between legal-financial authority and spiritual authority. While this report suggests that there was some kind of consensus that Ibn Rawḥ had appointed Samurī, some thought this was merely as executor for his properties. We might recall that according to Umm Kulthūm, Ibn Rawḥ, too, had been employed by Abū Jaʿfar to manage his properties during his lifetime. Familiar, too, is the test of knowledge to which Samurī was subjected. The Shiʿa tested him, probably asking legal or doctrinal questions, as they had tested earlier candidates for Imamate, and found him wanting. If we accept this account, the envoyship failed in the way the Imamate had: the available candidates were judged according to their knowledge of the preserved wisdom of the scholars. This was the mechanism by which Qummī scholars had excluded Jaʿfar "the Liar" from the Imamate, and which had been used to cast doubt on the Imamate of "the donkey" al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī by his opponents.[202]

The significance of the testing of Ibn Rawḥ and Samurī is great when we consider who the real successors to authority in the Imami community were to be: it was the scholars themselves who were to claim the role of

[198] Ibid., 245.
[199] This is the continuation of a report quoted above suggesting dissent about the succession of Ibn Rawḥ.
[200] This became the orthodox Twelver position represented in the reports preserved by Ṭūsī and others.
[201] Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 394–95.   [202] See previous chapters.

representing the guidance of the hidden Imam. Of course, as we have seen, Ibn Rawḥ's role as leader of the community was never divorced from the production and dissemination of scholarly opinions. It is possible that he himself was responsible for writing the judgments which appear in the rescripts attributed to the hidden Imam, or that he confirmed and validated judgments produced by others within the Imamic institutions. It is certainly explicitly mentioned that he was engaged in the latter process of validation of scholarship. The scarcity of evidence that Ibn Rawḥ could claim any scholarly output as his own sits rather uneasily with this validatory role.

THE DEATH OF SAMURĪ AND THE END OF THE ENVOYSHIP

By the time Samurī succeeded Ibn Rawḥ, the envoyship was probably already doomed. There are few activities mentioned for Samurī, and the report of his succession is a stereotyped statement of *naṣṣ* designation without any of the kind of historical details surrounding the succession of Ibn Rawḥ a generation earlier.[203] We may question whether Samurī was even an envoy in the sense of Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ. At any rate, he died just a few years after, and the major rescript attributed to him must have been generated posthumously, for it predicts his death, and declares the end of the position of envoy:

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Mukattib said:

I was in Baghdad in the year when Shaykh ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī died (QAR) and I came to him a few days before his death, and he issued a rescript to the people. Here is a copy of it:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī (may God magnify the reward of your brethren through you!), you will be dead within six days, so settle your affairs, and do not designate succession (*lā tūṣi*) to anyone to take your place after your death, for the second Occultation has occurred. There will be no appearance [of the Imam] (*ẓuhūr*) except after God has permitted, and that will be after a long time (*ṭūl al-amad*), and a hardening of hearts, and the filling of the world with oppression. And people will come to my Shiʿa who will claim to have witnessed (*mushāhada*) [the Imam], but whosoever claims eyewitness before the appearance of the Sufyānī and the Cry (*ṣayḥa*) is a slanderous liar[204] (*kadhdhāb muftarin*), and there is no strength nor might except through God, the High, the Great."

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[203] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 245.

[204] The focus on liars evokes earlier memories of Jaʿfar "the Liar," statements about the opposition to Abū Jaʿfar, and of Shalmaghānī himself more recently and therefore significantly for the context of the issuance of the statement.

He said: And we copied down this rescript and we went from him and upon the sixth day we returned to him when he was dying and it was said to him, "Who is your successor (*waṣī*) after you?"

And he replied, "God has an affair (*amr*) which He achieves Himself (*huwa bālighuhu*)." And he died (RAA) and these were the last words heard from him.[205]

Whoever issued this rescript was clearly aware of the precariousness of the position of envoy and the potential threat posed by future claimants both to envoyship and to Imamate. Abū Sahl had already announced the beginning of a second Occultation in the *Tanbīh*,[206] several decades earlier in 290/903, but his periodization of the two Occultations was never canonized. When the end of the envoyship was asserted after Samurī, however, the designation was to stick. Following this rescript, the new conception of the two Occultations was written into its final doctrinal form by Nuʿmānī in his *Kitāb al-ghayba* around 342/953.[207] In Nuʿmānī's hadith-based interpretation of the two Occultations he placed the era of the mediation by the envoys (*sufarāʾ*) firmly in the past, and declared the complete Occultation to be the era that would extend from the present period until the return of the hidden Imam as Qāʾim.[208] This became the canonical Twelver conception of the two Occultations.

Samurī's final rescript is primarily targeted against pretenders to envoyship and Gatehood. Several figures were the object of claims to continued envoyship after Samurī's death. In Ṭūsī's chapter on "The censured ones who claimed Gatehood," he mentions the case of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the nephew of Abū Jaʿfar and Abū Dulaf "the Madman" who made a bid for the envoyship in his name. Their claim was associated with delegationism (*tafwīḍ*) and pentadism (*takhmīs*)[209] suggesting, again, that far from being a merely bureaucratic concept, the envoyship was intrinsically compatible with claimants who emphasized the esotericist register of divinizing cosmological hierarchies which had long existed within the Imami community, and with which Shalmaghānī was associated. The Baghdadi elite, however, moved to refute his claim as disreputable:

[205] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.
[206] See the *Tanbīh*. Ibn Babūya, *Kamāl*, 93. Abdulsater, too, has noted this declaration of the second Occultation as a reworking of Abū Sahl's earlier suggestion. "Dynamics," 327.
[207] Nuʿmānī dictated his *Kitāb al-ghayba* to one of his pupils in 342/953 in Aleppo. Ansari, *Liʾimamat*, 37.
[208] Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, ed. Fāris Ḥassūn Karīm (Qumm: Anwār al-Hādī, 1422/2001–2), 164, 178–79.
[209] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 259.

Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Qūlūya said:

As for Abū Dulaf the Secretary (*kātib*) (may God not protect him) we knew that he was deviant (*ilḥād*), then he displayed doctrinal exaggeration (*ghuluww*), then he became mad and befuddled,[210] then he became a delegationist (*mufawwiḍ*).

When he entered Baghdad, [Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī] inclined toward [Abū Dulaf] and turned away from the community (*ṭāʾifa*) and designated [Abū Dulaf] as his successor, and we did not doubt that he was of his persuasion (*madhhab*) and we cursed him and disassociated (*barāʾa*) from him, because, according to us, anyone who claims leadership (*amr*) [i.e. the envoyship] after Samurī is an infidel (*kāfir*) sowing discord, misguided and misguiding.[211]

Here, while Abū Bakr and Abū Dulaf mount a claim to the envoyship, they are denounced on the grounds of doctrine, defeated by the consensus of an elite among the Shiʿa, who had now decided to ignore any claims to leadership after Samurī. Abū Bakr had a family claim, as nephew of Abū Jaʿfar. This recalls the testimony of Umm Kulthūm regarding Shalmaghānī and his Bisṭāmid followers who had deified the daughter of Abū Jaʿfar as well as the envoy himself. Clearly the very conception of the office of envoy, with its genetic relationship to the conception of Gatehood, and its assimilation of quasi-Imamic protocols of authority, was a danger to the conservative elite because of its potential to generate unregulated new claims. This is the framework within which we must view the strict proscriptions of the Samurī rescript. Clearly this was unsatisfying to some who wished the envoyship to continue, but in the face of such proscriptions, other potential candidates, perhaps more "moderate" and therefore acceptable to the core of the Occultation faction, demurred over the possibility of establishing themselves as envoy or *bāb*, even though they may have had some support. Thus, we see that a member of that elite, Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd, turned this position down:

Abū ʿAmr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Sukkarī said:

When Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd al-Qummī came forth at the behest of his father and the community (*al-jamāʿa*)[212] and they asked him about what was said about him regarding the deputyship (*niyāba*), he denied that and said, "I do not have anything to do with that." And money (*māl*) was offered to him but he refused, saying, "It is forbidden to me to take any of that, because no part of this leadership (*amr*) belongs to me, and I did not claim any part of it."

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[210] Reading *tasallala*, instead of *salsala*. Also, however, *salsala* can refer to being drunk from wine.

[211] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.

[212] Throughout this period, "the group" (*al-jamāʿa*) appears to refer to a specific body of notables among the Shiʿa.

And I was present at his conversation with [his father] at Basra.[213]

It appears here that Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Walīd[214] had been associated in some capacity with a campaign to take over the envoyship, or perhaps claims had been made on his behalf, but when confronted with this, he denied it. The fact that he was offered money suggests that the desire to continue donating Imamic revenues continued to be a strongly held need for the community. It is unclear if his questioners were convinced by his legitimacy, or if they were acting as *agents provocateurs* to bring him out into the open. It is notable that Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Walīd was the son of a great Qummī traditionist, and the leader of the community in Qumm,[215] a shift away from the fiscal institutions of the Imamate as a basis for claims of authority. However, instead of pursuing claims to centralizing quasi-Imamic leadership, and attempting to install himself as the envoy and collector of the alms tax, Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Walīd accepted the new era of more diffuse oligarchic-epistemic leadership of elites and scholars. We can date this to before 343/954, when the father of the report's protagonist, Muḥammad b. al-Walīd, died.[216] This places this event very close to the composition of Nuʿmānī's *Ghayba*, around 342/953, indicating that the consensus against the emergence of new envoys was completed over the course of the decade following the death of Samurī.

CONCLUSION: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ENVOYSHIP

Ibn Rawḥ inherited from Abū Jaʿfar something like an institutionalized envoyship. Ibn Rawḥ rose up through the ranks in service to Abū Jaʿfar, having managed his properties. He maintained the doctrinal and procedural precedents established by his mentor, issuing rescripts in response to legal and theological questions and in affirmation of the legitimacy of his own office. The envoyship collapsed two years after his death, but his efforts to shore up their position were instrumental in the ultimate canonization of the office of envoy as an element of the orthodox conception of the Occultation. It is in connection to his tenure that we see the application of the quasi-Imamic formal vocabulary of *naṣṣ* to the envoyship, as well as the first usage of the term "envoy" (*safīr*). Due to his involvement in court

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[213] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.
[214] This perhaps refers to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd, who was one of the hadith transmitters relied upon by Mufid. Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa-tafṣīl ṭabaqāt al-ruwāt*, 5th ed. (Qumm: n.p., 1413/1992), 3:45.
[215] On whom, see Ansari, *L'imamat*, 46.   [216] Ibid.

politics, Ibn Rawḥ's tenure is comparatively visible in the sources, both Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi, in contrast to the obscurity of the ʿAmrīs, and we can appreciate the high significance that wealth and political networks gave men within the Imami community of Baghdad, even though their ideological foundations implied a hostility to these same political circles. However, while Ibn Rawḥ's biographers note his high worldly station, his entanglements in the unstable and violent changes of fortune of ʿAbbasid court politics were a double-edged sword. While political contacts allowed him to have his rival, Shalmaghānī, executed, they also led him to being imprisoned when his political sponsors fell out of favor, undermining his ability to effectively manage the community, and facilitating Shalmaghānī's rise in the first place. The prominence of Ibn Rawḥ as envoy, and the dissolution of the envoyship, then, seem connected.

The dissolution of the envoyship was less the result of any one event than long-term processes in the dynamics of authority in the Imami community, which started during the lifetimes of the Imams. It is true, the shock of Shalmaghānī's esoteric counterclaims may have hastened the declaration of the termination of the envoyship with its concomitant warning against "liars" (read heterodox claims to charismatic authority) in Samurī's final rescript. But Shalmaghānī was not the first such figure. We must attend to the growing prominence of a counterweight to the individual authority of the envoy: throughout Ibn Rawḥ's tenure we see the increasing influence of an elite group of notables who accepted the Occultation of the hidden Imam, and resigned themselves to the leadership of the envoys. These include both scholars and other notables. The existence of elite consensus about the broad outlines of the new Twelver community made the declaration of the end of the envoyship possible without it causing a vacuum of authority. Following Samurī's death, potential candidates for an ongoing envoyship emerged from the wings. Claims appeared from a nephew of the second canonized envoy, Abū Jaʿfar; from an esoterist-incarnationist "madman"; and from the son of the major Qummī hadith scholar of the era. That the elite kingmakers of the community refused any of these candidates bespeaks the shift away from centralized authority altogether, a phenomenon we can link with the rise of hadith as the guardianship of the preserved knowledge of earlier Imams. This phenomenon had been underway even during the lifetime of the Imams, for the knowledge of the preserved textual tradition of the community had been used as a touchstone to test the legitimacy of Imams even before it was used to test envoys. The collapse of Ibn Rawḥ's envoyship, then, reads like writing on the wall.

Conclusion

New phenomena emerge from existing materials. The envoyship (*sifāra*), the office that has been the central subject of this book, emerged from the pre-Occultation institutions of Imamate – in particular, the Imamic agent-ship (*wikāla*), with some interplay with esoteric charismatic conceptions of the Gate (*bāb*) to the Imam. Following the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, a plethora of competing politico-doctrinal visions emerged to solve the problem of the identity of the next Imam. Imamic agents were among the key players, first, in contesting the different visions of the Imamate and then, in forming a core of support for the idea of the Occultation. But the image that emerges from a close comparison of the earliest layer of reports about this period does not suggest the clean and inevitable succession of the agents to authority. Instead, early accounts represent numerous conflicting attempts to conceptualize the nature of Imamate and authority in the new era, resulting in many doctrinal and political false starts and dead-ends before any consensus was achieved and the office of envoy emerged. The first years of what was later called the "lesser Occultation" were marked by a power vacuum.

The historical outlines of the envoyship are hard to trace because they are a moving target. While reports imply a historical development from the leadership of several old guard agents to one supreme envoy, the picture is complicated by the ongoing doctrinal elaboration of the theological significance of the envoy. This started during the lifetimes of the envoys, but continued well after the collapse of the institution, and resulted in the back-projection of the role of envoy into the lifetimes of Imams Hādī and Ḥasan, who, it is implied, intentionally installed the first envoys. This back-projection created the first envoy out of a man who initially only

appears as an eyewitness to the existence of the hidden Imam, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī. As for Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ, although they continued to be referred to as agents throughout their tenure, it seems that they can be set apart from the early pro-Occultation agents, in that they adopted quasi-Imamic roles and protocols which marked them as superior. Thus, the envoy came to be clearly recognized not merely as the first of equals among the Imamic agents, but as the unique and designated mediator for the Imam. In focusing the community's attention on a single mouthpiece for the Imam, the idea of the envoyship with its centralizing model of authority allowed for a consensus to develop and to be enforced through astute political maneuvering in the face of opposition even from other Imamic agents. This consensus included doctrinal and political elements. The central doctrinal element was the recognition of the existence of a hidden Imam who was the son of Ḥasan, an idea that brought a complex of theological and hadith-based arguments in its wake. The central political element, which itself increasingly took on doctrinal relevance, was the leadership of the envoy as mediator for this Imam.

In the political domain, our sources depict the decades after Ḥasan's death as being characterized by a number of bitter controversies: the inheritance contest between the mother and brother of the deceased Imam; the confusion over whether to accept Jaʿfar "the Liar" as Imam; competition between agents; the claims of charismatic esoterists to religious authority; and the pressure of polemic and conversion from outside the Imami community. There were numerous attempts to write the influential role of certain actors into narratives of religiopolitical authority, but many of these attempts resulted in dead-ends. The guardianship of Ḥudayth, the mediation of the pregnant concubine and Badr and ʿAqīd the eunuchs, and the charismatic agentship of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq are included by later compilers in order to project the overwhelming and incontrovertible weight of evidence in favor of the existence of the hidden Imam, but they originated in modes of Occultation-era authority which had quickly become obsolete.

Collaboration between the old guard agents of the deceased Imam was first aimed at asserting the continuity of the old institutions of Imamate in the face of the unacceptable claims of Jaʿfar "the Liar." This institutional continuity was, in part, driven by the needs of the wider community who wanted to keep sending their canonical alms taxes to a representative of the Imamate. The key advantage that the agents had over other claimants to Imamic mediation was that they were embedded in the protocols of the Imamate. The agents had already been actively involved in producing

Imamic letters and seals, answering requests and questions, and collecting canonical taxes. The Imamic rescripts issued in support of the envoyship of Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ were not persuasive because of a doctrinal argument they put forward, but rather because they physically represented the Imamate to a community long used to experiencing their Imam in epistolary form. This is the reason for the acute interest displayed by our sources in the physical details of this correspondence: the ink, the paper, the seals, the handwriting, and the layout of Imamic responses. Throughout the tenure of the envoys, the idioms that they employed were bureaucratic rather than scholarly, although they did use their bureaucratic charisma to grant Imamic imprimaturs to the works of other scholars. A central reason for the transitional success of the envoys was their ability to manipulate the protocols of the Imamate to represent the continuing manifestation of Imamic charisma to the community.

In the doctrinal domain, the idea of Occultation had precedents in the ideas of the Kaysāniyya, and the Wāqifa, as well as other Imami splinter groups and the early Ismailis. It is true that Occultation in these earlier cases had been condemned by the Imamiyya who continued to recognize manifest Imams. While not perhaps mainstream, then, neither was Occultation an alien idea. Moreover, there were two very mainstream Imami doctrines current upon the death of Ḥasan which strongly implied the proposition of the Occultation. These were the necessity of Imamate at all times, and the need for unbroken father-to-son succession. The Imamis were largely unwilling to accept, as the Zaydis did, the possibility that there might be no appropriate Imam for a spell of time. When combined with the doctrine of father-to-son succession, this was an almost inevitable recipe for crisis sooner or later. No single lineage can be expected to sustain itself with numerous suitable sons at every generation. Sure enough, sons were born too young, or seemed otherwise unqualified, even in the generations that preceded the Occultation up until the Imamate of Ḥasan, who appeared to have had no sons at all. Of course, doctrine can prove to be remarkably malleable: when there is a political will, there is a way.[1] However, in the political realm, events conspired to

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[1] Shiʿi history furnishes us with numerous such examples, like the Fatimids and other Ismailis' eternal tinkering with numerological and genealogical schemes which predicted which Imam would be the one to usher in the end times, but which had to be adjusted to allow for rulers who wanted to continue ruling their worldly domains. See, for example, Abbas Hamdani and François de Blois, "A Re-examination of al-Mahdī's Letter to the Yemenites on the Genealogy of the Fatimid Caliphs," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1983): 173–207.

prevent a doctrinal fix to the expiration of the Imamic lineage. The most obvious solution would have been to accept a brother-to-brother succession, a possibility that was already accepted by the Faṭḥiyya. But the reputation of the most obvious successor, Jaʿfar "the Liar," had been spoiled in the feud between the two brothers. Imami elites had already invested themselves in the cursing and excommunication directed at Jaʿfar by Imam Ḥasan. Given the choice between Jaʿfar and no one, the key followers of Ḥasan opted for no one, or rather no one visible: the idea of a "hidden Imam," who was soon identified as the child of Ḥasan.

When the old guard agents died, there was a transition toward the unique authority of Abū Jaʿfar, the first clearly recognizable envoy (safīr) to emerge after the ad hoc corporate leadership of a number of old guard agents of Imam Ḥasan. Although the office of envoy was defined by a transition from corporate to singular leadership, by the time the office had matured with the succession of Ibn Rawḥ, the role of an oligarchic elite of the Shiʿa surrounding the envoy had become much more prominent. This elite did not claim to participate directly in transmitting the Imam's guidance, but they are constantly present in narratives relating to Ibn Rawḥ, keeping an eye on the envoy and his agents. We often hear reference to leaders (wujūh), chiefs (ruʾasāʾ), venerable men (shuyūkh), or the party or community (al-ṭāʾifa, al-jamāʿa) giving assent to the envoy's activities. The mixed vocabulary and profiles of these men suggest that they were a mixed elite including scholars, but also other generally prestigious figures in society: bureaucrats, landowners, and Imamic agents. The existence of a diffuse oligarchic elite persisted after the final collapse of the envoyship (though what became of them in the decades that followed is beyond the scope of this book). They appear as instrumental both in accepting the claims of Ibn Rawḥ in the first place, and also for deliberating and ensuring the smooth transition to an envoyless future. A similar elite operated in similar ways during the lives of the manifest Imams, and their reemergence under Ibn Rawḥ contrasts with the disunity of the community in the earliest years of the Occultation, when the loyalty of the elite was split between various pretenders to leadership: the mother, the brother, concubines and eunuchs, scholars and agents. Post-envoy, this elite of scholars and important families formed the basis for the reconstruction of a part of the Imami community as "Twelvers."

The political leadership of the envoys was accompanied by a certain cosmology of leadership and divine guidance, which were subtly enforced against competing doctrines. The elusive references to a "split" that centered upon the question of delegationism (tafwīḍ) during Abū Jaʿfar's

tenure, and Shalmaghānī's claims to manifest the divinity thereafter, are both debates pertinent to the doctrinal understanding of political authority. Both the delegationism debate, and Shalmaghānī's conception of the hierohistorical manifestation of the Divine in prophets, Imams, and envoys, are formulations of the role of divine guidance in the community in an era when the Imam is not accessible. The moderate delagationism espoused by Abū Jaʿfar as a compromise between rationalists and esoterists maintains that God's power is instantiated in creation as a response to requests from the Imam, and thereby also the envoys who are in touch with them. By contrast, the idea of the direct indwelling of the Divine in the envoys proposed by Shalmaghānī cut out the need for a leader from the biological lineage of the Imams. Instead, the envoys and Gates (*bāb*) would themselves become divine objects of veneration – a solution that was not acceptable to the elite of the Shiʿa, but which, for some, imbued the office of envoy with a charismatic aura, visible in the minority reports transmitted by Khaṣībī and Ibn Rustum.

Following the collapse of the envoyship, the Baghdad-based oligarchic elite was instrumental in rejecting new claims to a centralizing envoyship. The "heresy" of Shalmaghānī had demonstrated to the elite of the Occultation faction the dangers intrinsic to the envoyship as a structure of mediation for the hidden Imam. As long as the office of envoy existed, it would be vulnerable to challenges from charismatic claimants. This rejection of envoyship as a continuing office thus laid the foundation for the leadership of the scholars which was to characterize the community in successive centuries. The Imami elite had always counted among its ranks many scholars, and after Ibn Rawḥ, scholarship, especially when combined with *sayyid*-descent, became overwhelmingly dominant as a benchmark for elevated claims to authority. Initially this primarily meant hadith scholarship. Two key early Occultation-era texts produced at this time, Kulaynī's *Kāfī* and Kashshī's *Rijāl*, both begin by suggesting that hadith knowledge is the major criterion for embodying guidance in the new era.[2] While Baghdad continued to be important after the demise of the envoyship in the fourth/tenth century, scholarly leadership in the community was prominently associated with Qumm and Rayy through figures like Ibn Bābūya and Nuʿmānī. Ibn Bābūya himself, although his representation of Imamic guidance was firmly based on his scholarly credentials, also had a link to the more direct guidance of Ibn Rawḥ, as his father is said to have asked the envoy to send a request for children to the hidden Imam, resulting in three sons, two legal

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[2] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 1:5; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:32ff.

scholars (*faqīh*) and one ascetic (*mushtaghal bi-l-ʿibāda wa-l-zuhd*).[3] Thus, although Ibn Bābūya's scholarly leadership is a different kind of guidance from that of the centralizing, revenue-collecting envoys,[4] he is also portrayed as representing a certain kind of continuity with the charisma of these old institutions through the miraculous Imamic imprimatur placed upon his scholarly authority at the hands of Ibn Rawḥ.

After the fourth/tenth century, leadership of the community seems to have returned again to the seat of the envoys, Baghdad, with the rising influence of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and his students, the *ahl al-bayt* dynasts al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā. These latter, especially, were associated with the Buyid and caliphal courts in the fifth/eleventh century, when the Qummī mastery of hadith was supplemented and superseded by the use of theological reasoning.[5] In spite of the changing idioms of doctrinal problem-solving, these figures inherited some of the frameworks of authority from the period covered in this book. They continue to produce works of legal and theological responsa (*masʾāil*) which echo the rescripts of the Imams and their envoys. However, the leadership of the scholars never recrudesced into a new envoyship.[6] Twelver Shiʿism had been forged, but the age of the agents was over.

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[3] Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 194–95.

[4] Notwithstanding, it is quite possible scholars in this era may have overseen the collection of alms taxes from local communities, though I have seen no explicit evidence for this.

[5] Hussein Abdulsater vividly describes the high-status intellectual, social, and political networks in which Raḍī and Murtaḍā moved. *Shiʿi Doctrine, Muʿtazili Theology: al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 16–21.

[6] Twelvers have developed nothing comparable to the Bohra Ismaili office of *dāʿī muṭlaq* who permanently represents their hidden Imam; or clerical leaders like Christian pontiffs or patriarchs. One can, of course, consider the rise of hierocracy following the Safavid state's establishment of the Twelver scholars as a clergy followed by the rise of the *marjaʿiyya* as a more independent structure of clerical authority in the nineteenth century. Norman Calder, "Marjaʿ al-taqlīd," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3:45–48.

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